



Rethinking the Destination Image Formation of the Lofoten Islands in order to Eliminate the Seasonality

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the destination image of Lofoten is projected by the local DMO and examine how the undesired impacts of seasonality could be eliminated with a reshaped destination image. The motivation behind the purpose came after reading the articles that were published about the increased tourism arrivals during summer in Lofoten and the challenge it means for the stakeholders. These articles depicted a negative picture and I wanted to explore the projected image of Lofoten by the DMO and to find out how this image could be reshaped in order to use it as a tool to eliminate the seasonality. I approached this problem with the qualitative method of discourse analysis. The data consists of textual and visual information, gathered from the website and social media accounts of the local DMO, Destination Lofoten, tourism operators and user generated content in the form of blog entries about Lofoten. The paper critically discusses how the projected image by the DMO should enhance Lofoten's unique characteristics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 2017, some of the most popular tourist destinations in Europe such as Barcelona, Dubrovnik or Venice reported anti-tourism marches. These cities were so overwhelmed by the tourist arrivals during the peak season that the governments had to introduce certain sanctions and regulations to lower the number of the visitors (Coldwell, 2017). They all have a well-established destination image but negative news like these might easily cause damage on the reputation of them.

To solve the problems of mass tourism and offer alternative forms, thus creating an attractive and sustainable destination image, have been long debated in the tourism research (Butler, 1989; Nash & Butler, 1990). The 1980s saw an extensive growth, regarding the “alternative” forms of tourism which were intended to change the unhealthy practices of mass tourism, however, these provided only partial solutions (Zurick, 1992; Weaver, 2012). Adventure tourism was one of these tourism forms which gained wider population during those days as before it had been considered to be an “elitist” segment, maintained for professionals, not “real” tourists (Hunt, 1989 in Swarbrooke et al., 2003). As it was predictable, this form of tourism was gradually explored and conquered by “non-professionals” with the help from the side of the tourism suppliers, which realized the potential in adventure tourism products and started to develop them in order to fulfill the needs of the travelers (Swarbrooke et al., 2003).

The popularity of adventurous activities have seen a boom in the recent years as beside the well established Western markets, others such as Chinese are becoming more and more significant. According to the predictions, the number of individuals, who not only can afford to take a holiday but also looking for unique, adventurous activities continue to increase (UNWTO, 2014) and in the next decade the Asian markets will drive the tourism growth, which means a significant amount of travelers (Gardiner & Kwek, 2017). In addition, the Internet played an important role in the marketing of adventure tourism, because online promotion is a very effective and inexpensive strategy to aim niche markets even at the global level (Swarbrooke et al., 2003).

1.1 Problem formulation

In my work I aim to examine the online image of Lofoten Islands, Norway as an adventure tourism destination. The destination markets itself as “Norway’s untamed islands” which refers to the pure and unspoilt wilderness that awaits the visitors (www.thelotuspost.com). This distant and cold archipelago has seen a tourism boom recently as it became a popular “adventure playground” among tourists. The destination image depicted by Visit Lofoten describes it as the perfect adventurous getaway with various activities. However, there are other images besides this, depicted by “non-professionals” which show a less favorable situation. The popularity of the animation movie *Frozen* (2013) from Disney boosted the whole tourism industry in the Nordic country as tourist arrivals reach record heights (Beaumont-Thomas, 2014). The archipelago itself with its 24 500 permanent residents sees around 1 million visitors annually. This fact contributed to stories and narratives, released in the mass media, which depicted a negative and unfavorable image of this destination and the “untamed” characteristic seems to be debunked. The infrastructure is under heavy pressure due to the tourist influx and the residents have to face with traffic problems, shortage of waste disposal facilities and the lack of public toilets. These problems also effect the environment as some of the most visited beaches on the island are already suffering from erosion and a small wood near a popular climbing spot is simply called among the locals as the “forest of shit” (Henley, 2016). Locals blame the seasonality, because most of the tourists arrive during the summer (lifeinnorway.net).

In fact, the Nordic countries are high-cost, therefore have never belonged to the most popular tourist destinations and never aimed to be a place for mass tourism, which they were very proud of (Toivanen, p.350, 2006). This recent interest towards Norway although can easily change the situation as according to the predictions, the emerging markets from Asia are highly interested in adventure tourism (Gardiner & Kwek, 2017) and thanks to the restored diplomatic relationship between Norway and China a massive flow of tourists can be expected from the Asian country (Lawrence, 2017). The national strategy or the tourism industry launched by the Norwegian Ministry of Trade and Industry (2012) set up normative principles regarding the destination image through the quality of the products. In this document, it is identified that the tourism industry’s profitability should be increased by attracting high-income, “quality-conscious” tourists, who are able to pay for these distinguished products, instead of increase the tourists arrivals. However, in practice one of the last frontiers of the wilderness is

overwhelmed by the tourists during the summer months and some fear of irreversible damages both on the physical environment and on the reputation of Lofoten (Henley, 2016).

1.2 Research objectives

There is a well-established literature on adventure tourism from the Western point of view towards Western regions, however, most of them focused on the North-American regions whereas significantly less academic research was conducted on the European settings, out of 53 empirical studies only 7 focused on Europe (United Kingdom) in the past 5 years (Cheng et al., 2016).

In my research I aim to explore and analyze the projected destination image of the Lofoten Islands on the online surfaces (tour operators and travel agents' websites, official tourism websites and online travel blogs) as a high-end, quality adventure tourism destination. Lofoten's marketing as "untamed islands" presume exclusivity, isolation, adventure and peculiarity. This also assume quality adventure tourism products that are based on this spectacular setting. In destination image formation it is important to examine if the images projected by the marketers are corresponding to those that are held by the visitors. Therefore, I aim to examine travel blogs, and articles that are written by "non-professionals" for the investigation and better understanding of the "untamed" characteristic.

The research aims

- Examine and identify how the "untamed" characteristic as a destination image projected by the DMO is presented and reflected in the tourism products.
- Analyze and discuss how the DMO could reshape the well-established image of Lofoten in order to target the impacts of seasonality and reach steadier tourist arrivals both geographically and in time.

1.3 Setting the scene: Lofoten – Norway's untamed islands

One of the key attractions that can be found in Northern Scandinavia is the appealing landscapes of the Lofoten Islands. The peripheral archipelago is situated in the Northern part of Norway, surrounded by the Norwegian sea, far within the Arctic Circle. Despite its geographical location, Lofoten has a relatively mild climate and thriving ecosystem, thanks to the Gulf Stream. The total area of the archipelago is 1226 km² and the population is around 25 000.

Svolvær is the capital of Lofoten, situated on the island of Austvågøy and with about 4500 inhabitants it is also the biggest town on the archipelago (visitnorway.com). The main islands are Austvågøy, Gimsøy, Vestvågøy, Flakstadøy, Moskenesøy, Værøy and Røst.

The islands look very dramatic with mountains that as tall as 600-1000 m and rise nearly right above the sea. The special mix of its climate, landscape and nature designated the Lofoten Islands a perfect adventure tourism destination. Unique natural phenomena attract tourists all year long, during the summer the midnight sun can be experienced, which means that from late May until the end of July the sun does not sink below the horizon. The northern lights start in September and last until mid-April, providing attraction for the winter months too. Among several adventurous activities, visitors can choose from hiking, skiing, ocean rafting, scuba diving and Lofoten is one of the world's northernmost places for surfing. The Islands are famous for their fishing activity, which has always played an important role in the locals' livelihood and nowadays it is built in the tourism attractions. This meant economic and cultural connection to the rest of the world, and the archipelago was not isolated. The most popular activities are mountaineering, kayaking, sea safari, cycling, hiking, fishing and surfing. More recently photography trips became popular, not only capturing the northern lights, but the spectacular landscapes as well (Travel Guide 2017 Lofoten, 2016).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the following theory section the researcher aims to outline those concepts and issues that are relevant to the research objectives. First of all, the adventure tourism concepts will be presented to the reader in order to gain basic insights regarding this phenomenon. In the next section the concepts of destination image and image formation will be displayed. The last section of the theoretical review contains the basic insights on the tourism in Norway and the projected destination image of it.

2.1 The conceptualization of adventure tourism

Adventure tourism considered to be ambiguous and subjective as the term “adventure” itself is evocative, followed with images and emotions connected to it. The nature of adventure cannot be described by only one characteristic, but with various elements from both positive and negative aspects such as challenge, exploration, excitement, danger, risk and anticipated rewards. Those, who put themselves in an adventurous situation accept the negative aspects of it in return for valuable experiences (Swarbrooke et al., 2003).

Adventure tourism along with ecotourism, nature tourism and cultural tourism often fall under the term of alternative tourism, which was conceptualized during the 1980s as an answer with different ethics to the problems of traditional mass tourism, although during the following decades the borderline between them significantly faded (Hall, Müller & Saarinen, 2009), what’s more, significant overlaps can be recognized among these forms (Swarbrooke et al., 2003, Buckley, 2006). Aall (2011) noted that there are leisure activities which might teach participants a more environmentally friendly style of living that they can built in their everyday routine returning back from their holidays, and the different forms of alternative tourism are supposed to be more knowledge-based activities than other forms within the industry in general (Hall, Müller & Saarinen, 2009).

Due to the complexity of adventure tourism, the conceptualization of it had been reviewed again and again during the years (Ewert, 1985; Lew, 1996; Walle, 1997; Weber, 2001) as the customs of the tourists changed and with pushing their own limits, certain activities ceased to be considered as adventurous whereas other, more difficult activities became easily accessible for a wider public (Gilchrist et al., 1995). During the conceptualization of the adventure tourism,

the tourists' motives and the psychological implications of it played an important role, especially in the early years after its emergence (Cheng et al., 2016). The first interpretations connected adventure to distant and incredible locations and the outcome of these tales created positive emotions on the listeners. This adventure image is often reflected on the wilderness, which still represents non-material values that are opposite to the materialistic world that surrounds the average people and offer a great opportunity to escape from the monotonous everyday life. It is important to note though, that this approach of the adventure image originated from the Western perception and has always connected adventure to the conquest of the wilderness. This fact already assumed a certain type of attitude of the tourists towards the wilderness as the concept of conquest involves the superiority of the individual. In addition, the touristic uses of wilderness also rooted in the Western approach towards these places according to which their involvement in the global tourism scenery brought these peripheral and often underdeveloped places closer to the "modern" world (Hall, Müller and Saarinen, 2009). The 1990s-optimism promoted adventure tourism as a great mean for those who wanted to find a way out from their everyday routines with exploring places that are "off the beaten track" and distinguish themselves from mass tourists (Bott, 2015). Various theories in the definition of adventure tourism, such as Risk (Ewert, 1985) or Insight Theory (Walle, 1997), notion of play (Gyimóthy & Mykletun, 2004) or rush (Buckley, 2012) were introduced, but these researched the demand side of adventure tourism and the pre-trip experience, whereas the supply side and the post-trip experience remained ignored (Cheng et al., 2016).

Whereas the motives of the tourists formed an important part in the conceptualization of adventure tourism, it is also important to note how the composition of the market expanded throughout the years. In the very early stage of adventure tourism, only a limited number of people were considered to be as "real" adventure tourists, so this type of tourism counted as an "elitist" segment within the industry as the accessibility of it was very low (Swarbrooke et al., 2003). The participants were mostly professional tourists with high income (Lew, 1996) and Hunt (1989) named various criteria, such as skills, the effort required to accomplish the activities or the remoteness of the location to define the main characteristics of adventure tourism. It didn't take long though, before adventure tourism reached a wider public and more and more people became interested in it. Their desire to break away from the masses and get out their comfort zone created the demand to explore the places and activities which are off the beaten track (Bott, 2015) and prompted suppliers to tailor products that fulfill the needs of "non-professionals" (Swarbrooke et al., 2003).

The exact size of the adventure tourism market is arguable, because the adventure travelers are broadly defined as the definition of adventure tourism itself considered to be obscured (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2014). “The wide spectrum of activities involved, and their overlap with other tourism activities” (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2014, p. 1450) also distort the size of the group of the participants (Cheng et al., 2016). The Adventure Travel Trade Association (2013) categorizes the participants based on the activities they take part in, which are defined as “soft” and “hard” adventures. Typical soft adventure activities do not require special skills and the risk level is low. Some examples are fishing, hiking, horseback riding and scuba diving. The tourists who participate in soft adventure activities are looking for quality complementary services regarding accommodation or transportation. Hard adventure activities are characterized by higher level of risk and require certain skills from the participants. These types of tourists are more likely to engage themselves in the local culture and use traditional accommodation. Hard adventure activities are caving, climbing or trekking (Goodnow, 2005).

Pomfret & Bramwell (2014) suggested the separation of the “package” and “independent” adventure tourists, because in the tourism research they are represented together, although their characteristic might differ from each other.

2.1.1 The negative aspects of adventure tourism

The impacts of adventure tourism fall under three categories: economic, which are generally regarded as positive, environmental which are negative and social that both can be negative and positive. Adventure tourism is always about “doing” rather than “seeing”, undertaken in outdoor settings, thus the direct contact with the nature is inevitable and the natural environment plays an important role in the whole adventure experience. This implied the need for involvement of new places and in the recent years incredible new destinations became accessible from the depths of the oceans to the polar ice caps in order to maximize the adventure experience (Cater, 2006). One of the main criticism of adventure tourism is that the participants travelling off the beaten track to uninhabited places and they disturb more fragile environments than the mass tourism does. There is possible that the tourists are not even aware of the dangers that they visit means to the environment and the great amount of time until the nature recovers from this damage (Chen, 2015) in addition, the locals benefit economically only for a short-term from these activities (Wang, 2009). The fast changing preferences of the adventure travelers easily can turn a small-scale destination to a mass market target within a short period

of time, which raises problems such as waste management, usage of artificial equipment that damages the environment or the violation of the local culture (Swarbrooke et al., 2003).

Safety issues are re-emerging topics in the adventure tourism research, yet according to Cheng et al. (2016) there is a lack of detailed academic research in this area, despite the fact that injuries and fatalities can significantly undermine the reputation of not only the suppliers, but this type of tourism as well. The dominant role of risk in the adventure tourism experience forced the suppliers into a paradox situation: in their products they have to find a balance which provides the thrilling risk for the customers and at the same time follow the safety regulations, within the frames of sustainability (Williams & Soutar, 2005).

Due to the cultural differences, the reputation of adventure tourism activities may vary from country to country. Gardiner & Kwek (2017) noted, that the whole adventure travel industry was built on satisfying the needs of the visitors from Western cultures, this resulted that in the adventure tourism literature Western is the predominant viewpoint (Cheng et al., 2016). Accordingly, the positive or negative evaluation of an activity is based on Western values. One of the best examples for this is the hunting tourism in the developing countries, which has a very negative reputation in the Western countries and merely interpret it as the exploitation of the natural environment, whereas the host countries see it positively, because they regard it as an opportunity for employment (Swarbrooke et al., 2003).

2.1.2 The supply side of adventure tourism and its characteristics

On the demand side the definition of adventure tourism is a broad-spectrum due to the various perceptions of the tourists on it, whereas from the viewpoint of the supply side it is clearer to draw the borderline and define which activities fall within the adventure tourism industry. Although adventure tourism is complex on the supply side too, as some of the suppliers also operates within the mainstream tourism industry, while others are specialized on the adventure tourism (Swarbrooke et al., 2003).

The characteristics of the supply side are that the adventure tourism businesses are small-scale, locally-controlled (Chen, 2015), usually run by people who have interest or passion for adventurous activities. They are often called lifestyle entrepreneurs, as their business allows them to make a profession out of their hobby. The positive aspect of this kind of enterprise is

that the operators are not driven by profit maximalization, but to sustain a fair standard of living (Schott, 2007). Those tour operators, who work in the field of adventure tourism, have to face challenges that are different from other types of tourism. Among these, there are environmental, personal and policy issues. The increasing demand for the adventure tourism products both on the demand and on the supply side makes it difficult to keep the sustainability principles, puts pressure on the resources, results cutting costs whereas demand heavy investments into the products “*and general lack of control and regulation by the government and tourism industry associations indicate that adventure tourism may be close to the edge of unacceptable practice for a long-term future*” (Williams and Soutar, p. 251, 2005). In addition the tour operators play a significant role in the perception of risk and insights, thus the agents must be well-experienced and trained in order to find the right balance between the perceived and real experiences. The personal characteristics of the agents also add an extra dimension in the experienced adventures as they need to understand and fulfill the demands of the customers, yet keep everything under control (Williams and Soutar, 2005).

The role of the destinations in the adventure tourism experience has key importance and involve the above mentioned elements of the supply side and the key attraction that stimulates tourist arrivals.

There are different typologies of adventure tourism destinations, which I would like to present shortly in the following. There is a distinction between traditional, long-established destinations and modern destinations, which are in many cases the outcomes of tourism development policy or the introduction of a new adventure activity. The geographical location, the seasonality, the particular types of activity and the composition of the market also define the characteristics of an adventure tourism destination, in addition it should be distinguished whether its products are solely based on adventure tourism or other important types of tourism are also represented. Besides these, there are destination where not only the types of activity count as adventurous, but the visit of them itself as they are often lack the proper infrastructure and they are not well-prepared for tourist arrivals unlike those destinations, which are safe, own proper infrastructure and well-established for touristic needs beside adventure tourism facilities. There are destinations that actively engaged in the promotion of adventure tourism and there are those that still attract adventure tourists, despite do not actively promote it. Lastly, adventure tourism destinations are also distinguished whether the whole area of them offers adventurous activities or they are dispersed to individual venues (Swarbrooke et al., 2003).

Within the destinations, adventure tourism venues are distinguished and the diversity of adventure tourism depends on the selection of them. The venues can vary from natural to artificial, commercial/non-profit, or private/public and there is a possibility of a scenario when a venue expand to a destination within the destination (Swarbrooke et al., 2003).

2.2 The conceptualization of the destination image

Destination image has always belonged to the most popular topics in tourism research because it is an important tool for market segmentation and positioning (Kim & Chen, 2015), thus a well-established positive image of a destination is viable regarding its competitiveness (Pike, 2007). In the destination selection process, the perception of the destination image plays a crucial role as it is related to travel satisfaction and the perceived quality of the destination (Kim et al., 2017). The generally accepted definition for it is “*a compilation of beliefs and impressions based on information processing from a variety of sources over time*” (Choi et al., p. 119, 2006). The destination image consists the following components: cognitive, which is a mental answer to the physical characteristics; affective, which is the emotional response for the previous and recently a third component, known as conative, was introduced and connected to the behavior (Marine-Roig & Clavé, 2015).

Destination image cannot be examined as a static concept, it is rather dynamic, complex and subjective thus several models were introduced for the structuralizing of it. Even the term image is used in different contexts and various emotions, knowledge and beliefs are attached to it (Jenkins, 1999). There are differences between the projected image by the DMOs and the perceived image by the individuals (Kislali et al., 2016). Gunn (1988 in Choi et al., 2006) divided the perception of destination images into two categories: organic, that are obtained by empirical experiences, such as school education, books, stories of friends and family (word-of-mouth) etc.; and induced, that the destination created about itself through promotion and marketing. However, Jenkins (1999) noted that the most important image of the destination is not created by the DMOs but the visitors. According to the stage theory, at the different stages of the tourism experience this image varies significantly as the tourist enters the pre-, during and after consumption, thus DMOs should re-evaluate their projected image considering this aspect as well. This practice not only brings closer the imagination and the reality, but

encourage the possibility for a repeated visit, which has a positive side-effect as the returning tourists' can depict a more realistic and multiple image.

2.3 Destination image formation

For a long time DMOs had total influence over the formation of a destination image and this provided them the privilege for easily sharing information according to their preferences (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2012), although due to the increased role of the Internet, the formation of the destination image has become more complex, thus textual and visual information have to be examined together (Choi et al., 2006). The empowerment of the consumers challenged the DMOs to find strategies to turn this to their advantage. Most of the studies focused on *"three main components of a destination image: cognitive (the sum of what is acknowledged about a destination, affective (that represent one's feeling toward a destination and conative (the likelihood of trip intention toward visiting a destination."* (Kim & Chen, p. 115, 2015). Kislali et al., (2016) suggests, that the categorization of the destination image by examining separately its components might be misleading and superficial, but with a more thorough review, it can be identified that there are aspects that cannot be measured and investigated in such a way, for example the atmosphere. Throughout the conceptualization of destination image Echtner and Ritchie (1993 in Kislali et al., 2016) set up a three-dimensional framework with a more holistic approach to overcome this shortage. According to this, the destination image formation happens on three continuums: the first continuum consists of holistic impressions of a destination, that is feelings towards it. The second continuum includes the functional and psychological characteristics of the destination. The landscape for example is a functional characteristic, whereas the atmosphere or the locals' behavior is psychological. The third continuum implies the common image attributes, such as the public transport, and the unique image attributes like the Pyramids in Egypt. In a simpler way, the three dimensions are: attribute/holistic, functional/psychological and common/unique.

Kislali et al. (2016) introduced a framework that enables a more holistic approach of destination image and involves the incorporation of factors such as technology, UGC and sociocultural factors. They suggest that the DMOs should leave behind the traditional approaches of destination image formation and rather understand the way how the various stakeholders communicate it. In addition, they think that DMOs should embrace the communication and

collaboration processes among the businesses and the individuals and in the long-run implement a collective way of image formation.

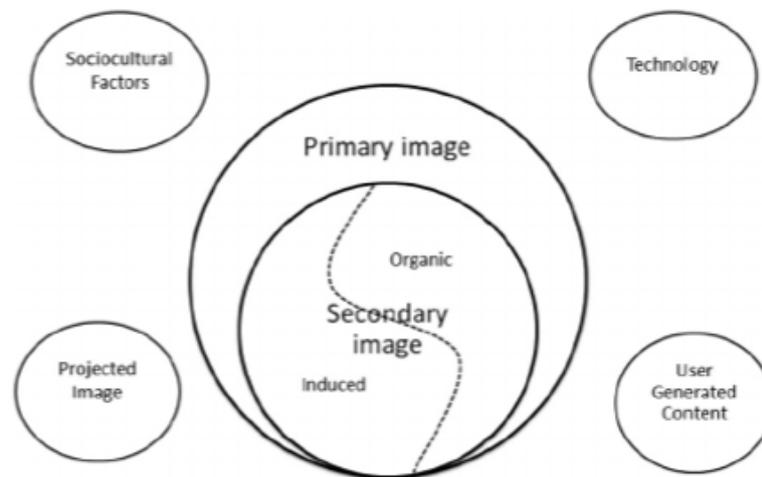


Figure 1. Proposed framework to conceptualize destination image formation (Kislali et al., p. 74, 2016)

Kim & Chen (2015) use the schema-driven approach. Place schemas represents the physical characteristics of a destination both natural and human-made. Every place has their unique characteristics that connected to the perceived destination image. Mega-event schemas are those that connected to international sport events or world fairs and unique in a way that don't occur repeatedly. Crisis schemas are linked to natural or man-made disasters which can permanently change the perceived destination image in a negative way. Self-schemas are defined on two levels, collective and individual. It is about self-definition and identifies factors such as socio-demographic characteristics and personality which influence the perception of a destination image. Emotional schemas are the extracts of the above-mentioned components and can be understand as a response to them. These schemas altogether might form stereotypes and associations regarding the destination and referred to them as Prime Tourism Destination Schemas (PTDS).

2.4. Destination image formation: new approaches

Because of the information-intensive nature of the tourism industry, the Internet proved to be a great platform for promotion in a relatively inexpensive way. To use it in the most efficient way, both the businesses and the DMOs have to consider about the new approaches the destination image is formed and integrate them into their own strategies (Kislali et al., 2016).

In the recent years, the social media (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Tripadvisor etc.) has obtained an important role in every aspect of people's life, that it affected how they consume and share information. The definition of social media is "*Internet-based applications that carry consumer-generated content encompassing media impressions created by consumers*" (Xiang & Gretzel in Kim et al., p. 688, 2017). It also made a huge impact on the tourism sector and beside the professional, user-generated content (UGC) also appeared in the form of reviews, blogs and photography which added a new dimension to the destination image (Marine-Roig & Clavé, 2015). With the possibility of instant information exchange, the consumers themselves became active contributors to the destination image formation, and reliable sources with sharing their travel stories, communicating interactively both their negative and positive experiences (Kislali et al., 2016). The social media proved to be a platform for "*electronic word-of-mouth*" which has increasing importance as an information source for tourists and the tool for strengthen the reputation of a destination from various perspectives, connecting suppliers, consumers and third parties (Kim et al., 2017). Sometimes these non-promotional materials of the users are more likely heard by the people, than the actual message that the DMO intends to transmit about the destination image (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013).

This means a challenge for the DMOs, as they need to be aware of whether the UGC is in harmony with their desired representation of the destination, or rather depicts an unfavorable picture. Whereas they do not have the direct control over the content that is posted about the destination, they have the possibility to identify whether these images are favorable for them or they need countermeasures to eliminate the undesired images. In addition, with the exploration of UGC, DMOs can gain valuable information about the tourists, which they can turn to their benefits and implement in their own destination formation strategies (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). Kim et al. (2017) conducted a research on the effect of social media on destination image formation and their results showed that in general, the DMOs engagement in sharing information through social media platforms positively affect the destination image formation. With well-designed content, which means relevant, value-added, interesting and complete information, both the cognitive and affective perceptions of the tourists about the destination can be influenced in a positive direction.

Personal blogs/vlogs (video-blogs), photography and reviews are all popular forms among the tourist to share how they perceive a destination. One of the reasons why these forms are so popular is that they constantly provide up-to-date information. In addition, they are interactive

as the reflections of the users can appear in the form of comments (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013).

One popular form of UGCs are blogs, which offers a great opportunity to travelers to tell about their experiences and stories. These can be both positive or negative, and many businesses fear of the impacts of them. However, Schmallegger & Carson (2008) suggests that in reality, these blogs do not have a huge impact on the destination image, as many of the presented topics are about the physical attributes of a place and rather enhance the existing stereotypes. On the other hand, these blogs are considered to be more trustworthy and popular among the customers than professional websites. It might take a lot of work and time though for the businesses to find and evaluate the appropriate information for them (Akehurst, 2008).

Blogging is considered to be cheaper than the traditional practices in marketing and help to define the image of the destination. Blogs always should contain information, that is valuable for the reader, otherwise they become indifferent towards them. Analyzing blogs not only help to conduct market research, but might define the strengths and weaknesses of a destination and depict a more shaded image (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008).

2.5 Image formation through storytelling

The reflected image of a country is so important, not only from the point of view of tourism, but all country is interested what others think of them and whether it is a positive opinion. Although this image cannot be invented by marketing strategies or advertisement, because these mostly take the positive aspects, however the reality is never so simple. There are many ways, how foreigners perceive this image: books, media, personal contacts and travel (Toivanen, 2006).

In the destination image formation, storytelling also plays an important part for marketers. It is *“the interactive art of using words and actions ... and encouraging the listener’s imagination”* (Howison et al., p.328, 2017). Stories has the power to emphasize the messages of the pictures and affect the perceptions of the destination image and any participant in the tourism can produce them, even DMOs or tourism businesses. This approach for them helps the image branding, express values and narratives, in addition helps to create a positive link between the

visitors and the destination. With storytelling, it is easier for the destination to transmit relevant information and pass the desired image to others (Howison et al., 2017).

2.6 Tourism in Norway

From the tourism approach, nature is one of the most important resource in Norway and its quality fundamentally defines the tourism experience (Rønningen, 2010). To demonstrate the value that the Norwegian nature represents, I aim to introduce the established image of it. Since the first tourists arrived in the country around the middle of the 19th century, the western coast of Norway became a privileged destination of the elite for a long time. The mix of wilderness and the modesty of the local communities made the western coast an exotic and desired target (Puijk, 2000).

The Nordic countries never belonged to the most popular travel destinations and never aimed to be the place for mass tourism, which they are proud of. They had related to adventure from the early days of tourism in the 18th century when the enlightened people of Europe tried to expand their knowledge on the wider world and categorize it. The early travel stories about this region were full of constraint, when it came to describe the image of it. The descriptions such as ”...*the very reverse of Paradise. The seasons are all of them unpleasant...*” or “...*where the search for the picturesque involves the greatest discomfort*” dominated the perceptions about the Nordic (Toivanen, pp.350-351, 2006).

Later in the 19th century, the Romantics created an image of the “mysterious, impenetrable wilderness” of the Nordic countries (Toivanen, p.350, 2006), and their attitudes toward the wilderness was rather characterized by fear than positive emotions (Hall, Müller and Saarinen, 2009). Practically, until these days several elements of this wilderness image still vividly live in the mind of the Western tourists and the commodification of the Nordic places based on the narratives of emptiness, mythology and obscurity. The place, where the visitors still can find solitude, which in the continental Europe slowly becomes luxury, a commodified privilege (Toivanen, 2006). The tourism industry significantly contributed to the change and non-traditional uses of wilderness and define their development, in addition giving new meaning and values to these areas the concept of touristic wilderness was born. In practice, touristic wilderness became a product, that can be recycled, sold and consumed (Hall, Müller and Saarinen, 2009). What has been seen by the tourists nowadays as leisure pursuits, such as

“recreational fishing, skiing and sightseeing” (Chen, p. 225, 2015), in fact replaced activities which once meant the survival for the locals, including hunting, fishing and mining. Thus, the nature inevitably has been remained the main influencer of the Nordic tourism experience, especially in the case of Norway. As Toivanen noted, Norway always had a prominent place in the Scandinavian tourism as its landscapes identified it with the concept of the adventure itself, and being the part of Northwestern Scandinavia, which is listed as the most popular Arctic location in the world, has an important role in the whole adventure tourism industry (Chen, 2015).

It was only a 100 years ago that the polar regions were thoroughly mapped and now they see their “second exploration” in the form of tourism (Müller, Lundmark & Lemelin, 2013). Eight Arctic states are recognized by an intergovernmental forum, The Arctic Council, and Norway is one of the members (Chen, 2015). For a long time, the High Arctic region was ignored by the tourism industry, however nowadays it is changing as there is significant demand from the consumer side to explore these destinations which are often referred as the last true wilderness on Earth, into where the tourists barely penetrated (Hall, Müller and Saarinen, 2009). “Indeed, the Arctic has been viewed as being on the edge of the world, both geographically and culturally” (Chen, p. 225, 2015), with unique natural phenomena such as the midnight sun and the northern lights. The increasing international interest towards these regions clearly signs that the tourism industry will significantly influence the future of these areas (Müller, Lundmark & Lemelin, 2013).

The image which is internationally held about Norway, that it is a modern country with well-established communication, educational and media infrastructure with an economy that is becoming increasingly integrated with the global economy (Norway Economy, 2017). Since the 1990s, the role of tourism increasingly became an important element for the development programs, especially in the peripheral areas, such as the Arctic region. These areas are extremely threatened by the climate change, which became one of the major challenges in the Nordic tourism, thus they are always in the center of attention on an international level, in the context of sustainable development (Hall, Müller and Saarinen, 2009). Initially, the main aim with the tourism development of this region was to maintain a small-scale, limited-growth as a response to the negative effects of tourism development. To reach this, Norway has to follow a branding strategy that differentiate itself with high-quality products and attract conscious, high-demand tourists. As Toivanen (2006) noted, the real challenge is to avoid mass tourism and

attract truly demanding travelers to the Nordic, with an image that might contain imperfection, but must be real and true.

2.6.1 Brand platform for Norway as a tourist destination

“Norway is a special place, and going there makes me feel special too. The quality and uniqueness of the destination says something about me and gives me the status of a discerning person who demands more from my holiday.”

(Visit Norway, 2012)

The quote expresses how Norway wishes the tourists to perceive its destination image. The publication about brand values and image was launched by Visit Norway in 2012, that set up a number of attributes by which they would like to shape the image of Norway. In order to increase the industry’s profitability, the government’s tourism policy aims to support “quality” tourism, which means that they would like to attract high-income, quality sensitive tourists, who are able to pay a higher price for the products. This approach would enable to increase the sector’s performance, with less tourists. To reach this, the incorporation of the natural heritage means the basis of these products. The context of adventure tourism makes Norway a relevant destination: the nature is in contrast with the urbanized continental Europe, yet easily accessible.

The brand image transmits values like fresh, real, adventurous and open-minded, and suggests that Norway is for people who have high expectations on their holiday and “explorers”, thus not afraid to put themselves in adventurous situations. The promise of travelling to extraordinary places, far away from the civilization is indeed an appealing idea. Staying away from the masses has been one of the most attractive features in Norway’s tourism (Jacobsen & Dann, 2003).

The publication names four key selling points, where Norway can differentiate itself from other European destinations:

- fresh seafood and coastal specialties
- thriving coastal culture
- the unique landscapes and natural phenomena
- nature-based activities

The exposition of images about these elements are considered to be a powerful and universal tool in the communication of the brand values. They must reflect the values and the diverse characteristics of Norway, such as nature, culture, food and activities. The spectacular landscapes and natural phenomena should be in the focus of the pictures, combining them with active situations. Show all the four seasons, recommending that the unique experiences are available all year round.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Philosophy of science

Paradigm is *"a cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, how results should be interpreted"* (Bryman, p.630 2012). This research is based on the belief of constructionism, which explains the constantly changing state of the social phenomena in relation with the social interactions. This approach focuses on the attitudes and perceptions how people create the structures of the reality. According to this, individuals develop their understandings on the reality through experiences and interactions with other people (Walliman, 2006). *"Social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision"* (Bryman, p.33, 2012). In this ontological position, the researcher's presentation cannot be regarded as definitive, rather unique, in the sense that the reality is presented in her presentation (Bryman, 2012).

The researcher's reason why she decided to choose this philosophy is that it is in harmony with the research objectives, which aims to identify how the projected image of the Lofoten Islands by the DMO is reflected in the tourism products and influenced by the "non-professional" experiences and images. These image formation attempts also can be perceived constructionist, because they are based on the different perceptions of Lofoten and its projected image based on them.

3.2 Ontology

"The ontology is a theory of existence or being" (Hannam & Knox, p. 177, 2011). The ontology can be divided into branches: objectivism and constructionism. These perceptions both discuss the role of the social entities and their influence over the reality. The objectivist conception accepts the "passive" role of the individual, who does not have influence or reach beyond the limits of their reality, (such as culture or organization) and is limited to rules and regulations, thus objectified by beliefs and values (Bryman, 2012).

In contrast, the constructionism questions the pre-defined nature of culture or organization and instead implies a more pragmatic view: the rules and orders that characterize the reality are constantly being forgotten, terminated, revised and renewed (Bryman, 2012).

3.3 Epistemology

Epistemology is derived from the Greek words *episteme* (knowledge) and *logos* (word/speech), which can be translated as the study of knowledge (Newell, 2002). It connects the theory to the data in the knowledge creation, and involves questions like what we know, how we know that and the validity of this knowledge, throughout logical reasoning (Ritchie, 2005). In other words, epistemology is “*the relationships between reality and accounts of reality*” (Hannam & Knox, p.177, 2011) or “*the evaluation of he beliefs we have on the basis of some given body of evidence*” (Dick, p.7, 2013). According to the comprehension of post-structural epistemology, which rejects the disciplines of realism, reality is variable and contingent, and language is the key tool for creating personal realities.

The importance of epistemology lies in the distinction of true from false facts. The correct epistemology helps to make sense from the information and understand the reality (Landauer & Rowlands, 2001).

3.4 Exploratory Qualitative Approach

Hannam & Knox (2011) encourage the use of qualitative methods in the tourism research, because they enable a greater freedom for the researcher and more time to evaluate the collected data. “*Qualitative methods are employed to collect data about activities, events, occurrences and behaviors and to seek an understanding of actions, problems and processes in their social context*” (Goodson & Phillimore, p. 3, 2004). The qualitative research is not only about knowledge creation but reveals structures that are difficult to quantify, helps to bring the “*human factor*” and provides an “*insider*” perspective in the interpretation of a phenomenon or problem, as it examine phenomena in their natural context. Not only the problems are examined, but the meanings, that people attach them. Qualitative research approaches the understanding of them through their interactions and interpretations. It is important, because the tourism research has often led to “*the objectification of cultures, societies, geographies and people*” (Goodson & Phillimore, p. 39, 2004).

The researchers choose exploratory approach, when they are lack of knowledge on a specific phenomenon and it helps to determine data-collection method and the selection of subjects. The effectiveness of the research is based on two attributes, flexibility and open-mindedness of the researcher, in addition it requires creativity in order to gain the appropriate knowledge from the

often chaotic data. The exploratory research operates with various techniques such as secondary data, informal and formal qualitative approaches (Stebbins, 2001).

3.5 Primary data

The classification of the data is based on *who* collected it. According to the definition, the data can be considered primary, if the researcher himself/herself collects it for the specific purpose of the research and secondary, when the data was collected by someone else for a different purpose. However, new approaches claim, that the categorization of data should be rather defined by the method of collecting them (Meged et al., 2014).

The sources that the researcher uses in this thesis will be considered as primary data, because the websites and blogs will provide the basis of the data for the content analysis. In the followings, the researcher aims to detail the various sources and the aspects for the choice of them. These sources can be divided into two categories: professional content and UGC.

3.5.1 Lofoten.info

The official website of Lofoten is the primary starting point for exploring the destination image and promoted as the official travel guide. It is run by the local DMO, Destination Lofoten AS which is responsible for various activities, such as international and national marketing, product development, co-operation with international tour operators, the production of promotional material and providing tourist information. The Destination Lofoten is represented on other social media platforms as well, such as Pinterest, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram, however, I only intend to examine the last three platforms. The reason why I choose these three platforms is that being an active user of each (visiting them on a daily basis), I am the most familiar with these platforms. The website is not only for providing information, but the booking of accommodation, events and activities is also possible through it. At the first glance the website is abundant in pictures, whereas the textual data is insufficient.

3.5.2 Websites of various tour operators

During the websearch, I identified 16 adventure tourism companies, that operate on Lofoten and offer adventure tourism activities. For further analysis, I selected 5 according to the variety of their tours and activities they offer, which are the followings:

- **XXLofoten** - a local, privately owned Destination Management Company, organizing versatile activities. Over 16 years of experience in the tourism industry, they are considered to be one of the leading DMC in Northern Norway (xxlofoten.no).
- **Lofoten Lights** – local based tourism operator, run by Italians, who originally arrived to the islands as tourists. They started to organize guided tours in 2005, and nowadays they organize packages and tours.
- **Lofoten-Aktiv** – locally owned tourism business, employing only local guides, who are very knowledgeable about the nature. The company is environmentally conscious and have been “Certified Ecotourism Norway”.
- **Unstad Arctic Surf** – Opened in 2003, Unstad Camping is probably the northernmost surfing destination, operating throughout the year. In their profile, organization of packages, camps, surf school and renting can be found.
- **Lofoten Tours** – Photography tours are getting popular, and this company (established in 2013) is organizing photo workshops and tours guided by local people, with the natural landscapes and natural phenomena in the focus.

Most of them are locals and specialized on Lofoten based activities. Some of the operators restrict their product choice within one certain activity, whereas others offer a wide range of products within several different activities.

3.5.3 Blogs

Except for photography blogs, I did not find any travel blogs that solely focus on Lofoten, but Norway, although these blogs devote a significant part for the archipelago. I chose three of them, due to the topics they wrote regarding Lofoten and because they were written recently, thus provide quite a fresh outlook on the destination. I intend to analyze the textual and visual content of them in order to capture a wider understanding on the formed image of Lofoten.

All of the three blogs are written by people who are not originally from Norway, but moved there and explore the country and the nature throughout their trips. They share these trips in the form of blog entries, providing tips and report of their experiences to the readers. In the followings I aim to detail them.

Heartmybackpack.com

This blog is written by an American-Norwegian girl, Silvia, and depicts her life and trips, devoting a significant part for Norway. Her blog is especially interesting, because she does not only give travel tips or description about her trips, but also does not afraid to use a critical voice in her writings and highlights the negative aspects of the tourism in Norway as well. In addition, in the comment section the readers actively engaging themselves in conversations with her, giving meaningful reflections about their own experiences and insights.

Snowintromso.com

This blog is written by a German girl, Vanessa, who also lives in Norway and her blog focuses on the Arctic. On the blog, there is abundant information about Nordic trips, however, unlike Silvia, she uses more visual content than textual and less critical about the tourism. Under her articles, the comment section seems more active, however, instead of writing about their own experiences, these are mostly positive feedbacks about the photos.

Explore-norway.org

The writers are a German couple, who live in Oslo and throughout the years they took part on several trips around Norway. In their blog entries, they give insights about their trips and also useful information for the future visitors. They have a rather descriptive than critical style and the comment section is missing under their articles. They rather write about the positive aspects and avoid using negative voices. All in all, the content of this blog stands the closest to the official website of Lofoten.info, as it provides abundant tourist information.

3.6 Discourse analysis

The aim of this thesis is to explore the coherence of the destination image of Lofoten within the various representations of it. Discourse analysis (DA) is a flexible and a very effective approach for critical and reflective research perspective. There are three main categories that interpret the meaning of discourse: anything that is beyond the sentence, the language in use, nonlinguistic and nonspecific instances of the language (Schiffrin et al., 2003). DA focuses on the understanding of wider systems of knowledge and utilize visual and textual content, thus it is very important that the researcher pledges herself in the familiarization of the data collected. This method looks at the details and focuses on how people apply the language (Schiffrin et al., 2001). In cultural studies, the portrayal of images including videos and paintings might be considered as a form of “text” and as every textual data, the imagery also associated with certain

meanings that based on the subjective interpretation of the reader (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013).

This research is built on open-ended questions and DA is applicable for its narrowing down as the important dimensions of the findings start to emerge out of the data (Hannam & Knox, 2011). The researcher works with “found” data, which means that she did not collect it herself, but uses the available material as the basis of the analysis. The problem with managing the appropriate selection of these materials is that they need to be narrowed down in order to work with them properly. Too many or too scarce material can lead to incorrect conclusions (Taylor, 2013).

The analyzing process of discourse data never can be linear, as the researcher re-reading and decoding the data and instead of focusing on certain elements, the entire data set should be analyzed together. Therefore, DA is exploratory and iterative, constantly returning to the important points (Taylor, 2013).

3.7 Limitations

The geographical location of Lofoten proved to be the greatest challenge regarding the research process. The researcher did not get the chance to travel there and establish personal contact with the local stakeholders or get first hand experiences about the destination, thus her data collection restricted to online platforms.

As the project evolved and more questions and viewpoints emerged, the researcher tried to get in touch with local stakeholders to talk about their roles and perceptions regarding the adventure tourism on Lofoten, through various forms, such as e-mail, Facebook messages and phone calls. It proved to be a very difficult task though, as the stakeholders did not open up to tell about their insights and opinion. During the course of data collection, the researcher got in touch with one of the professors from the University of Tromsø as they offer the faculty of Arctic Adventure Tourism, focusing on marketing, management and communication, however, even his help as a mediator proved to be insufficient in order to make interviews with the stakeholders. They seemed to be very closed towards the researcher, despite the help of a mediator, and explained it with their lack of time, or deficient knowledge on the questions raised

by the researcher, thus because of the scarcity of the answers the researcher decided to change on her approach and focus on the available data through the Internet.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Lofoten.info: the foundation of the destination image by the DMO through visual content

“Destination image is an important tool for market segmentation and positioning” (Kim & Chen, 2015, p.15), therefore the examination of the established image of Lofoten must start with Lofoten.info, run by the local DMO, Destination Lofoten AS.

As Stepchenkova & Zhan (2012, p.16) noted, the total influence of the DMOs over the formation of the destination image has been limited with the growing importance of UGC, however they are still unavoidable and have the greatest power if it comes to the formation of the destination image. In the analysis of Lofoten’s image, established by the DMO, it was important to identify which basic values characterize the place and how they are represented. The perception of adventure in the nature-related context has always characterized the Norwegian tourism experience (Chen, 2015, p.21) and the values and key selling points, set up for the image branding of Norway can be discovered through the images that are customized to Lofoten. These key selling points are *“fresh seafood and coastal specialties, thriving coastal culture, the unique landscapes and natural phenomena, nature-based activities”* (Visit Norway, 2012, p.22). The images transmitted by Lofoten.info are strongly related to all of them and they dominate the opening page of the website, however, it must be noted that most of the visual data depicted there, covers nature/activity related pictures.

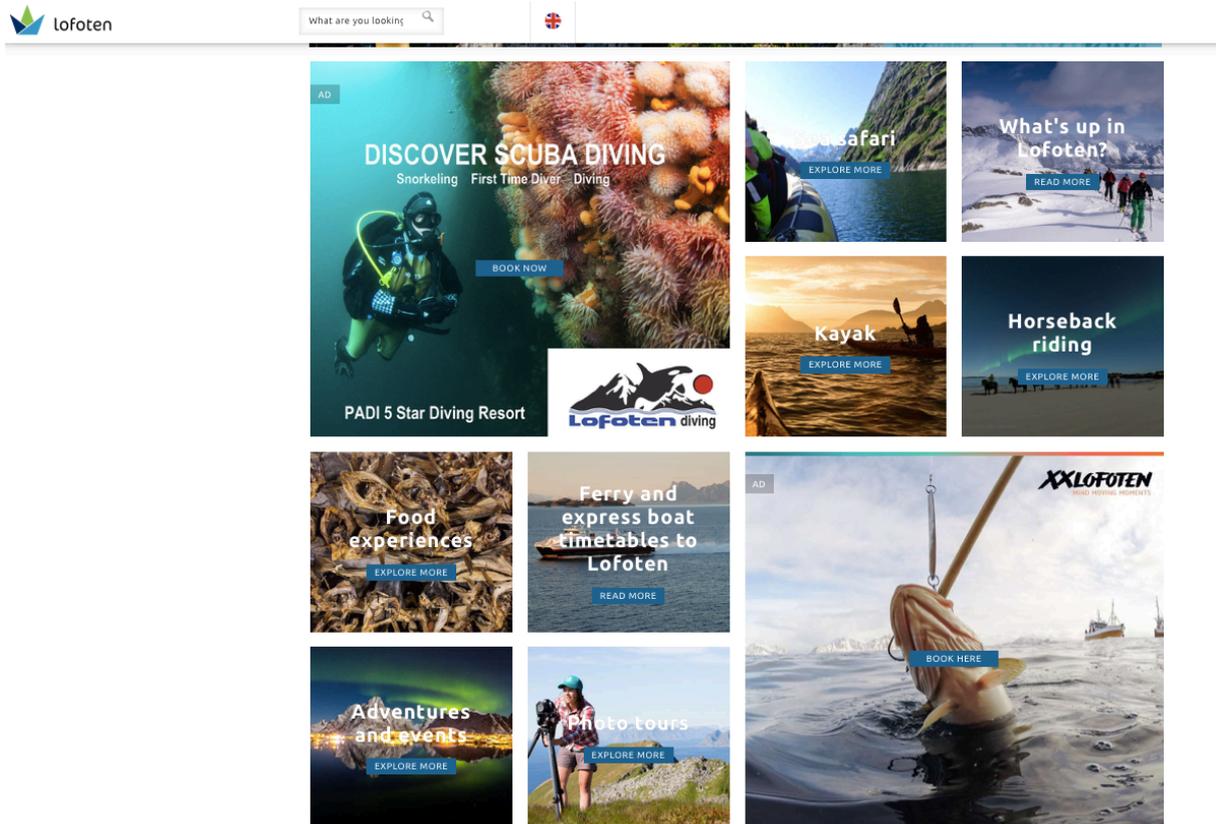


Figure 2. The key selling points of Lofoten listed by the DMO (lofoten.info)

The first thing that the observer can notice with looking at the pictures even without reading the texts is that how strongly this destination is connected to adventure, and adventurous activities. The activities, based on Goodnow (2005, p.12) categorization can be listed as “soft”, and the six activities that are emphasized are scuba diving, sea safari, kayaking, horseback riding, hiking (connected with photo tours) and fishing (Lofotfishing). These require basic or no skills from the participants and the thrilling/risk factor is relatively low (Swarbrooke et al., 2003, p.11). The pictures that depict the activities, put the tourists in the center as active participants, not just observers in the adventure tourism and show harmony between man and nature, with the diversity of the seasons as winter and summer are also illustrated.

Other pictures show the various elements of the key selling points such as unique landscapes, natural phenomena, fresh seafood and coastal culture, although the latter one is minimally represented and the local people are entirely missing. On each picture, there is a text, which helps the navigation among them, and each of them contain the “Explore more” button, which redirects the visitors to another page, where they find detailed information about the selected categories. Besides the highlighted adventurous activities, other categories are placed on the

opening page, which are for general information giving about Lofoten or expands the destination image with further available facilities on the islands, all of them illustrated with additional pictures:

- What's up in Lofoten? – illustrated with an image that shows a group of hikers during the winter
- Food experiences – the picture is used here depicts a pile of cod, but no visualization of an actual local dish that is made of it
- Ferry and express boat timetables to Lofoten – a ferry is shown here as crossing across the sea
- Adventures and events – the picture depicts a landscape with mountains and the sea, with the northern lights color the sky
- Lofoten Code of Conduct – the picture is made in a tent from the point of view of the tourists, who are looking at the intact landscape in front of them
- Travel guide – showing two climbers on a top of a mountain during summer time
- Conferences and events – one man (either a guide or a tourist) standing in front of the picture on a fisher boat with a catch whereas other tourists are depicted in the background
- The artistic and historical Lofoten islands – local buildings are presented in the background along with natural landscape
- Meet the Vikings – a Viking boat with people who are in authentic clothing, sailing across the sea, with mountains in the background.

With the further examination of the website, the distinction of the four seasons can be seen. The opening pictures of fall and summer are represented with natural landscapes, where tourists cannot be seen, whereas the winter and spring show visitors, during skiing and hiking activities. By clicking on each season, the list of activities can be found that can be pursued according to the different weather conditions. It can be seen that there are overlaps among the seasons and the activities that are available all year round.

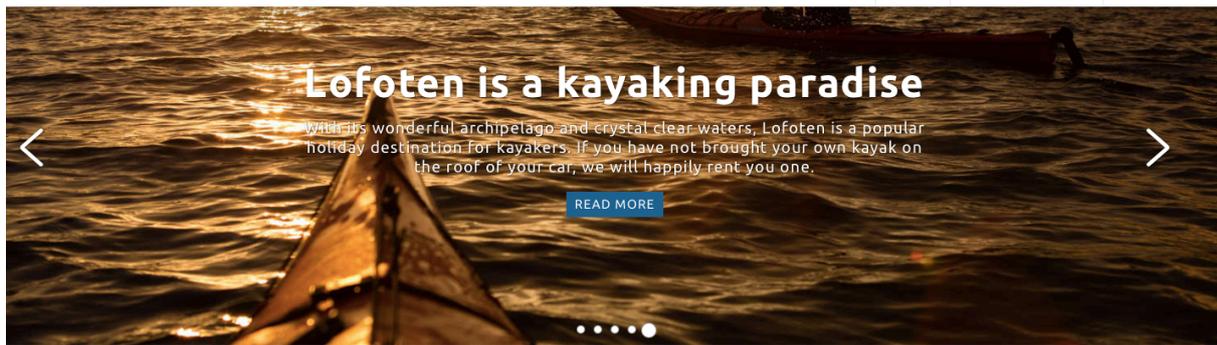


Figure 3. The representation of the four seasons (lofoten.info)

Such activities that can be performed in every season are kayaking, horseback riding, surfing, Lofotfishing and photo tours. However, not only the activities show overlaps from season to season but their visualization as well. Despite the subdivision of the year to the four seasons, the images that depict the activities remain the same in every season. The most successful portrayal of the dissimilarities of the different seasons were reached in the case of the two opposite seasons, winter and summer, where the use of colors (orange vs. blue) and the depiction of landscapes (snowy mountains vs sunny beaches) successfully illustrate the variety of the weather conditions. However, because of the repeated use of the same pictures throughout the website, the overall image of the separate seasons cannot be considered as uniform. Some activities are displayed in winter settings, whereas others during the summer which creates a mixed image about the seasons.

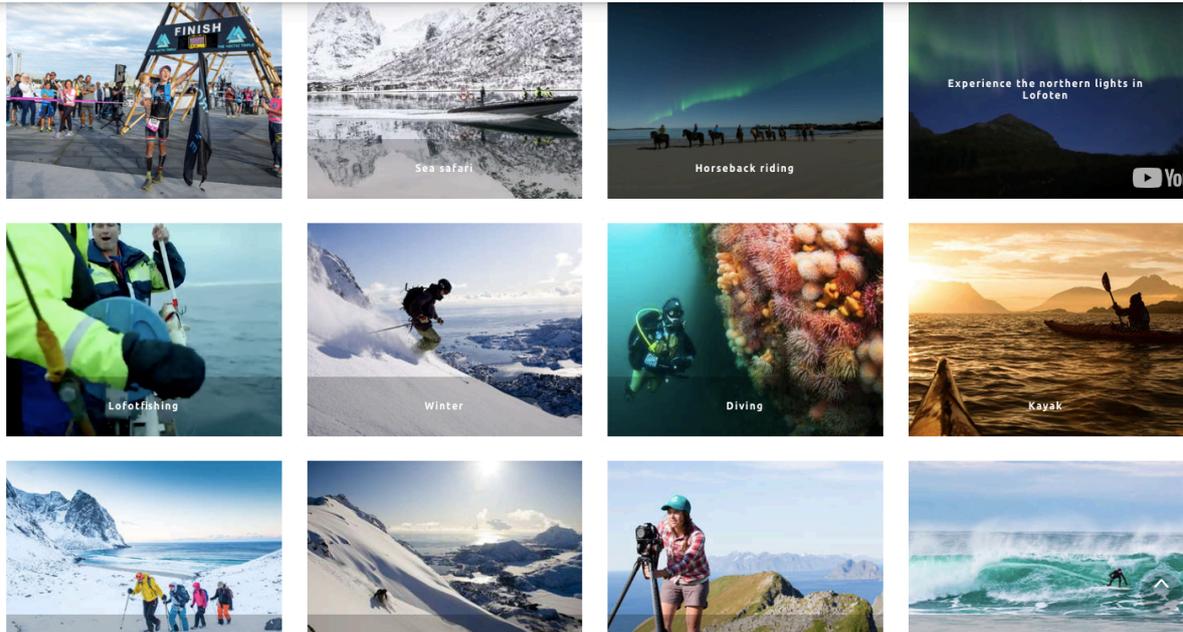


Figure 4. The visualization of winter activities (lofoten.info)

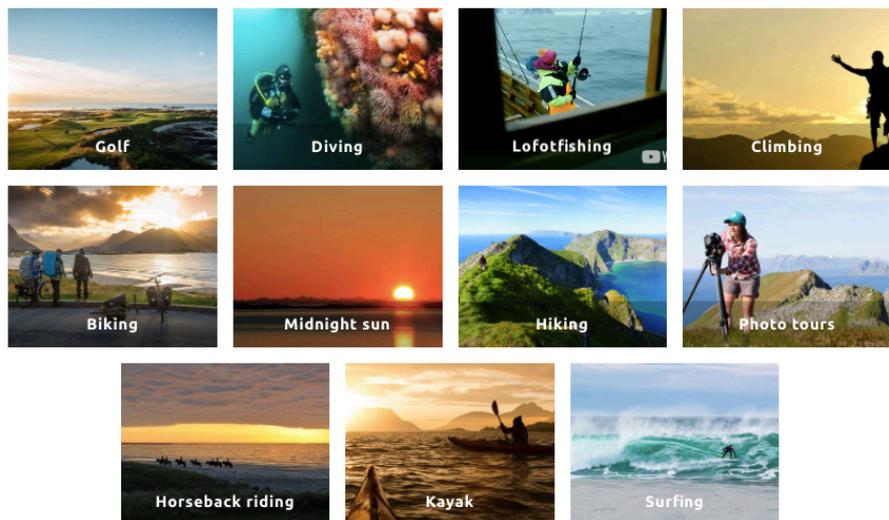
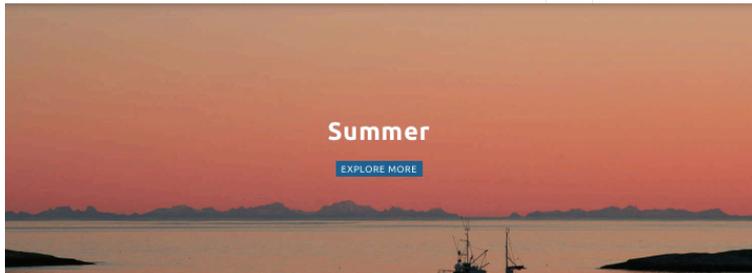


Figure 5. The visualization of summer activities (lofoten.info)

Finally, the natural phenomena also play an important part of the destination image formation. The depiction of the natural phenomena is ambiguous as both the midnight sun and the northern lights are presented as individual attractions or as background settings for other adventure activities, such as horseback riding, kayaking and midnight sea safari. In both cases, it is not only the natural phenomena that is shown on the pictures, but people as well, as the participants of the experience.

4.1.1. The presentation of images through Instagram

The analysis is continued with the deeper examination of the images transmitted through social media. On the bottom of Lofoten.info more images can be found and with clicking on them, the visitor is redirected to the Instagram account of it. Kislali et al. (2016, p.17) suggested that *“DMOs should leave behind the traditional approaches of destination image formation and rather understand the way how the various stakeholders communicate it ... and embrace the communication and collaboration processes among the businesses and the individuals ...”*. *“With the possibility of instant information exchange, the consumers became themselves reliable sources...”* (Kislali et al., 2016, p.18).

Destination Lofoten maintains an official Instagram account for Lofoten, under the username of @lofoteninfo. Here, the people are encouraged to tag it on their pictures, thus it is possible that that later they will be reposted on the account of @lofoteninfo. This practice enables the DMO to communicate with the visitors and engage them in the destination image formation, whereas the DMO also gets feedback about how Lofoten’s image is perceived and captured by them.

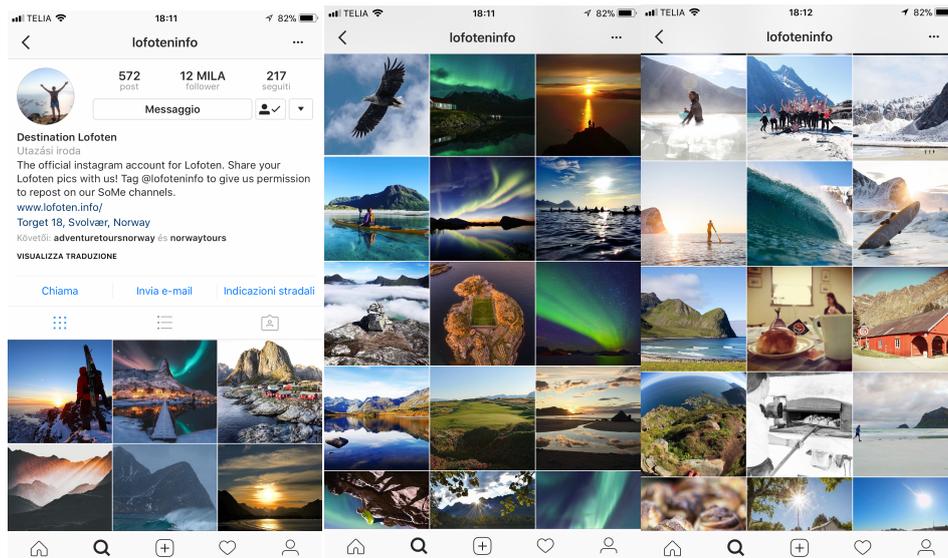


Figure 6. Instagram images shot by different individuals (@lofoteninfo)

Looking at the Instagram images, it can be observed that out of the four values, the natural phenomena and the depiction of the landscapes have even a stronger role here. In contrast to the website where the visitors are in the focus of most of the pictures, here they are still represented, however, the pictures rather concentrate on the nature and natural phenomena. From active participants of the adventure experience, the tourists became observers, as they are the ones who take the pictures and the followers of @lofoteninfo see Lofoten through their eyes. For the visitors, besides the midnight sun and the northern lights, the visualization of the landscapes seems to be important, especially focusing on the beaches, the sea and the related water activities such as surfing and kayaking.

The pictures are keeping up with the seasons, the most recent pictures are colorful and were taken during daytime in sunlight, giving the visitors a glimpse on the summer/early autumn atmosphere. The locals are still missing from the pictures and there are only a few images that portray wildlife, food, the coastal culture or architecture. In fact, pictures about streets, towns or the everyday life are missing or hardly presented.

With the further investigation of the pictures, it can be specified that not only the visitors' pictures are reposted, but the ones that were taken by local tourism businesses as well. The concept of "taking over" the account of @lofoteninfo by a local travel business for a week is applied. This means that for that week, the specified local business has the chance to introduce their activities. This is a good opportunity both for them to promote themselves and for the

DMO, as it helps to show the destination from different perspectives, which creates a versatile image about it. As Jenkins (1999, p.16) noted, “*Destination image cannot be examined as a static concept, it is rather dynamic, complex and subjective*”. The image formation through Instagram helps to catch this dynamic and complex aspect of the destination image and provides a platform that enhances the collaboration among the DMO and the businesses (Kislali et al., 2016, p.17).

4.1.2 Other social media platforms used by Destination Lofoten

Besides the Instagram, the Destination Lofoten has a YouTube channel and a Facebook profile. The material found on the YouTube is scarce, there are only a few videos, with a low number of viewers and only two subscribers. New videos are posted rarely, they are short and lack of narration. The focus is again on the landscapes, portraying the sea, mountains and the northern lights. The activities shown are fishing, cruising, sea eagle safari and skiing, however the focus is not on the tourists, despite they are shown in the videos, but on the nature. Despite the abundant material about the landscapes, there is a lack of shots about wildlife or animals. In addition, the introduction of the locals are still missing in the videos.

The Facebook page of Destination Lofoten contains both videos and images about the archipelago and posts content with a weekly basis. In the imagery, regardless of the season, the northern lights dominate, besides this, the coast, sea and the mountains are in the center. Many shoots are taken either from a top of the mountain or from the seaside. The activities that are shown here are focusing on fishing and sea safari, however, the visualization of the tourists is scarce. The locals again are missing from the imagery and many pictures show the wilderness, although the man-made objects such as buildings, roads and vehicles sign the presence of the human activity.

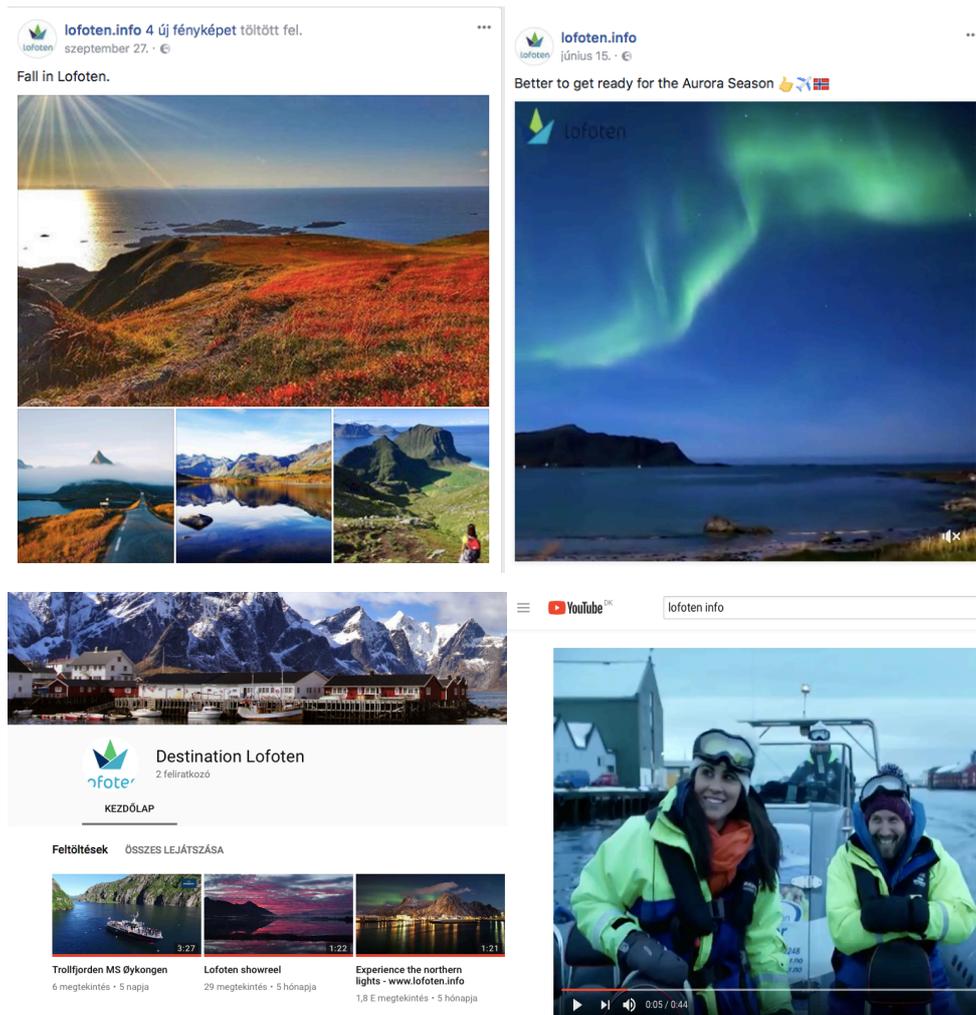


Figure 7. Examples for the visualization on various social media platforms (YouTube, Facebook)

4.2 The textual content depicted on Lofoten.info

In the following section, the exploration key selling points (fresh seafood and coastal specialties, thriving coastal culture, the unique landscapes and natural phenomena, nature-based activities) continues with the analyzation of the textual data on Lofoten.info.

I start again with the opening page, which is dominated by the visual data, whereas the texts are restricted to short sentences, regarding general information or the names of the activities, and if the visitors want to find more textual data they need to click on the above mentioned “Explore more” buttons on each image. Most of the short sentences are calling for activities that are connected to adventure and request active participation from the tourists such as: “Explore Lofoten”, “Experience the northern lights”, “Discover scuba diving”, “Meet the Vikings” or “Hiking in the Lofoten Islands is possible for everybody”. Other sentences attach

positive functional and psychological dimensions to the destination image, for example “*crystal clear waters*”, “*wonderful archipelago*” or “*Lofoten is a kayaking paradise*”. These are the first impressions about the text and to gain more data I need to explore the website, returning back to the categorization of the seasons.

The first thing that can be noticed, that except for winter, the other seasons are lacking a general description and the reader directly finds the list of the activities that are available in that certain period of the year. Therefore I start to analyze the textual content about winter. “*Winter in Lofoten is exciting. The Northern lights flare across the sky, you can enjoy the “blue hours” and fishermen are taking part in one of the world’s biggest cod-fishing events*”. The key selling points of thriving coastal culture and unique natural phenomena are detected in these two sentences and confirm the statement why winter is characterized as exciting. The text continues to characterize the arctic nights such as “... *a palette of deep reds and blues ... The sun dips below the horizon creating colours the likes of which will not be seen at any other time of the year...*”. This is in contrast with the cognitive perception about the High Arctic region, which is generally considered to be fully dark during winter time, and the positive aspect of the lack of sunshine is illustrated here. “*Short days mean that you have a good chance to see the Northern Lights*”. It is not only the natural phenomena that makes winter an appealing season, but various activities that can be pursued despite the weather conditions. “*This is the time when the skrei arrive from the Barents Sea ... while fishermen from all along the coast equip themselves in the fishing villages in order to take part in the annual Lofotfiske. ... Perhaps you would like to take part in the annual World Championship in Cod Fishing that is held every year in March?*”, “*Join in a snowshoe trek, a fishing village hike, or a circle dance at the home of a Norse chieftain in Borg*” or “*Will you test yourself on one of the world’s best surfing beaches?*” These are only a few examples highlighted from the soft adventure activities, but kayaking, horseback riding, diving, skiing and sea safari are also available during this time. The pursuing of many activities are related to the northern lights phenomena, which shows that despite the darkness, tourists still can participate in diverse activities. “*Experience the magic northern lights from the horseback*”, “*The ride will be in slow tempo and without daylight*”. Others focus on the beauty of the nature and emphasize how people can explore it and take part in an adventurous activity at the same time. For example, the description of the winter kayaking highlights the beauty of the wilderness. “*Even during the “dark period” you can spend the day paddling and exploring the Raftsundet Alps with the deep and narrow mysterious fjord ... a perfect venue for watching birds, sea mammals and complex environment ...*” This is in

accordance of Toivanen's (2006; p.20) interpretation of the image about Norway; the place where people can the pristine nature and loneliness. The guided snowshoeing trips offer to explore the wilderness on foot, with an experienced guide, and the characteristics of the nature are even stronger depicted here, than in the case of kayaking. *"Snowshoeing is an easy way to get close to the nature without too much hassle, and everyone can use them."*, *Intriguing stories will be told, easy walks in our fantastic, silent nature is our goal for the trip.*", *"We don't go far to find complete silence and wilderness."* The fantastic and silent attributions enhance the cognitive perception of the nature and positively influence the emotions of the reader, while the fact, that the tourists don't have to go far to find the wilderness assume that this place is intact and pure. Beside the snowshoe explorer and the northern lights trips, the skiing is the other activity that is only available during winter.

I continue the introduction with the summer, because this is the time for the other unique natural phenomena, the midnight sun and the weather conditions are the most appealing in this season. Interestingly, the textual data here is rather scarce and there is no general description about the season opposite to the case of winter, therefore I work with the texts that are written about the different activities. There are overlaps among winter and summer, as diving, Lofotfishing, horseback riding, kayaking, surfing and photo tours are also available during winter. The golf, biking, climbing, hiking and the midnight sun mean the difference compared to winter. The presentation of these two phenomena show parallels between each other. Similarly, to the northern lights, the midnight sun is also depicted here both as an individual attraction, or the background for other adventurous activities. The description of the phenomena starts with the definition of it and the text approaches the phenomena from rather a scientific than a touristic point of view: *"Midnight sun means that the sun, when at its lowest point in the course of a single day, does not disappear below the horizon and, given that the layers of cloud are not too thick, is thus visible 24 hours a day."* This phenomenon alone is an adventure, but the visitors can attend horseback riding, kayaking or midnight safari in order to complete this experience with additional values. The horseback riding during the midnight sun is described like this: *"Magical lights from horseback!"*, *"We ride on the white beaches and experience the beautiful countryside on horseback."* and *"It's a special experience to be out in the arctic nature at midnight, we think its magical."* The variety of nature was better emphasized through the description of the kayaking activity: *"Lofoten's nature has unique and spectacular contrasts and kayaking is a great way to experience these"*, *"Kayaking at night give this experience a whole new dimension."*, *"You can appreciate Lofoten's dramatic mountains from a wholly new*

perspective when you paddle up close to them. It is an experience almost as majestic as standing on top of them.” In many cases, for example about diving or climbing, the textual information is missing.

The description of the fall and spring activities do not provide any addition information, only repeating the same narratives that are already told about summer or winter. The only difference is that the natural phenomena are not represented here. The activities that are available all year round are Lofotfishing, horseback riding, kayaking, surfing and photo tours, but the visitor is not informed why these would be good periods of the year for a visit.

The overall perception after the examination of both the visual and textual data is that all the key selling points are represented in the destination image transmitted by the DMO, yet, there are some of them that are outstanding, such as the nature-based activities and the natural phenomena. The DMO markets Lofoten as an adventurous place, for those who are looking for active holiday, and the facilities are available all year round. The natural phenomena (northern lights, midnight sun) play an important role in the presentation of the place, and especially dominate the visual material. In the following section I aim to introduce, how the image of Lofoten is created in different areas, such as tourism operators, blogs and media.

4.3 The image formation through the tourism suppliers

In this section I am to explore how the tourism operators contribute to the established image of Lofoten, and whether any differences can be detected compared to the Lofoten.info.

Imagery of the tour operators

The visual content found on the websites of the tour operators can be divided and categorized according to the key selling points. XXLofoten has the most versatile imagery, depicting adventure activities, the coastal culture and the local cuisine, along with the natural landscapes. Lofoten Tours and Lofoten Lights focus on the natural phenomena and the landscapes, such as the coast, mountains and the sea, as they both offer mostly hiking and trekking tours. They minimize or entirely avoid the visualization of tourists or locals and put the nature in the focus. Lofoten Aktiv and Unstad Arctic Surf have the least visual material and logically, these pictures focus on the specific activities they offer, putting the tourists in the focus. The profile of Lofoten Aktiv is organized around kayaking, hiking and snowshoeing, whereas the Unstad Arctic Surf

is specialized to surfing. Therefore, both businesses use images with tourists in the focus, participating in various activities, while the landscapes play a secondary role.



Figure 8. Adventure tourists during hiking (lofoten-aktiv.no)

Opposite to the Lofoten.info, the year is only divided for two seasons in the case of these tour operators: winter and summer and the pictures are categorized according to that. The use of images shows greater variety in their case, as they do not use the same picture twice, unlike Lofoten.info, and the overall visualization of the seasons is more unified than on the website of Destination Lofoten.

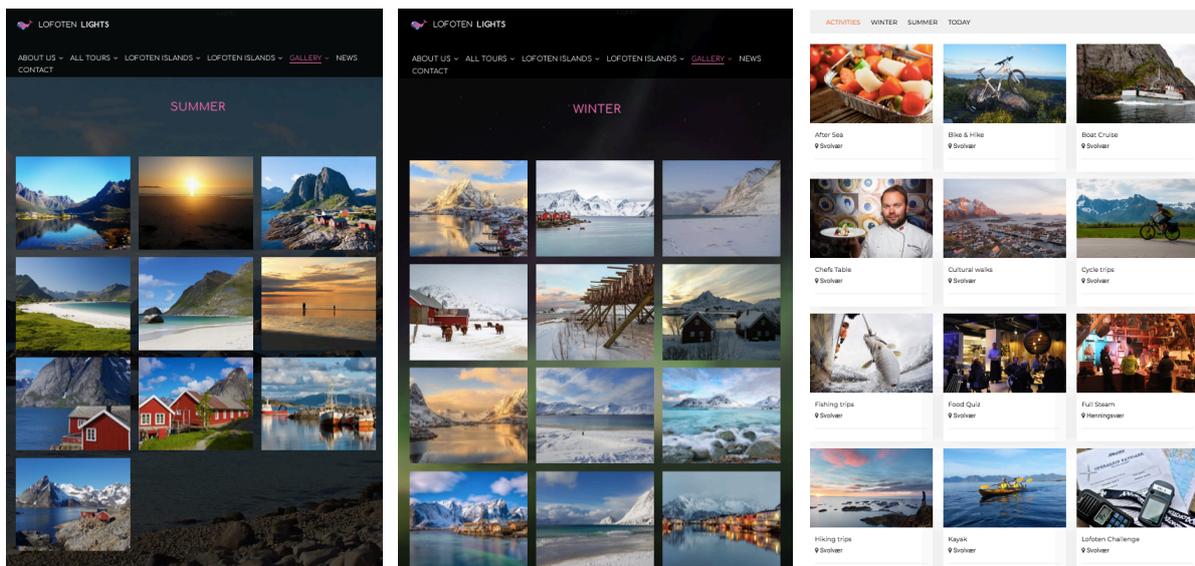


Figure 9. The depiction of the two seasons by different tour operators (lofotenlights.com, xxlofoten.no)

On those images, where the nature is in the focus, the tourists are missing and the depiction of the coastal landscapes dominate, with the sea, beaches, fishing cabins, boats and mountains in

the background. The same settings characterize both the depiction of winter and summer: the pictures were taken during daytime and from similar perspectives, the only difference is that the landscape is covered with snow in the case of winter. The northern lights still play an important part in the portrayal of winter, while the midnight sun is barely presented.

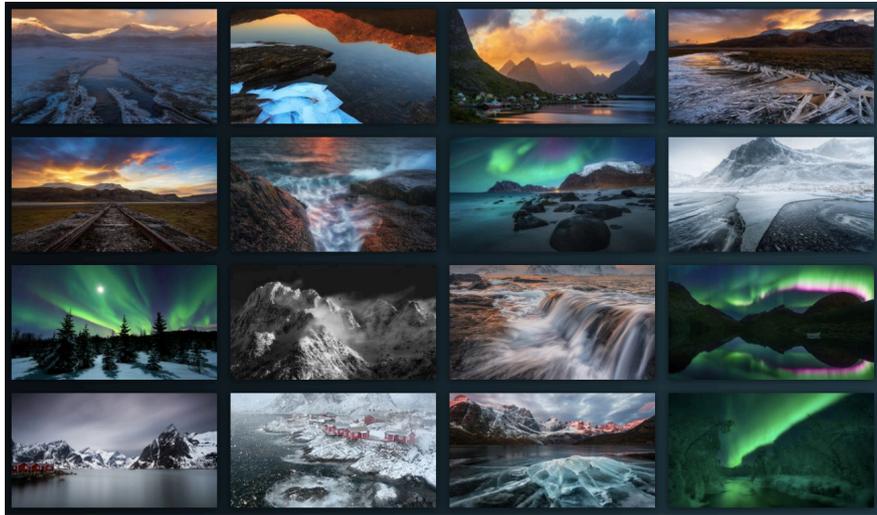


Figure 10. The visualization of winter by Lofoten Tours (lofotentours.com)

The visualization of the wildlife is still very poor, showing mostly fishes, however, the visualization of the locals is more usual, along with the depiction of food and indoor activities, although the portrayal of people varies among the different tour operators. In some cases, they are in the center of the picture, whereas in other cases they become a “part” of the landscapes, illustrating them in the background.

In overall, the visual content transmitted by the tour operators shows diversity, and the depiction of the landscapes is even more versatile, then in the case of the DMO. The key selling points are even better transmitted here, as the food and coastal culture got a greater role in the imagery. However, with the lack of fall/spring imagery, they suggest that these intermediate periods are lack of activities, or not interesting enough for a visit. On the other hand, the representation of these seasons from the DMO side are lack of a lot of information about these seasons and shows many over lapses with summer and winter, which makes this kind of subdivision unnecessary.

Textual data by the tour operators

Before I start with the further analysis of the texts that are transmitted about Lofoten by the tour operators, I aim to introduce, how the tour operators define themselves and their products.

In their introduction, each tour operator emphasizes their knowledge about Lofoten, which they regard as the basis of the quality in their products, such as: “*our extensive local knowledge*” (XXLofoten); “*our guides are well-known in the areas we operate in ... they know of the finest venues that will give you the best experiences*” (Lofoten-Aktiv); “*with our vast experience, we organize excursions, whether in summer or in winter, to discover uncontaminated nature and marvelous landscapes*” (Lofoten Lights); “*we believe in quality and our goal is to make sure that our visitors get the best possible experience*” (Unstad Arctic Surf); “*we take great pride in offering the best product available... we guide you to hidden local treasures*” (Lofoten Tours). These characterizations are in accordance with the intentions of Visit Norway, which would like to promote quality tourism in Norway, with products that based on the unique natural heritage and knowledgeable experts working in the field (Visit Norway, 2012, p.22). In addition, these descriptions contribute to the image of Lofoten as an adventure tourism destination as well, suggesting that the quality of the products provide a unique experience, and the operators have insider knowledge that let the tourists have a glimpse in the secrets of this distant and mysterious archipelago. These secrets revealed by them can be the locations, where the observation of the northern lights is the most optimal, a guided tour on the best hiking trails or an interesting story about Lofoten’s past.

The texts used by the tour operators are variable, regarding the various activities that are available on the islands. In some cases, the textual data is scarce, restricted only basic information and the reader has the feeling that the tour operators intentions were “let the images speak for themselves”, for example this characterizes the website of Unstad Arctic Surf. Other tour operators, are very informative about certain activities and the experiences connected to them, such as northern light tours, kayaking, hiking or fishing. For example, the Lofoten Tours about their northern light tour shares this: “*The natural beauty of this incredible landscape offers will present us with the possibility of exploring colourful fjords, jogged mountain peaks, unique beaches and the world renowned Arctic lights.*” This description does not only focus on the northern lights, but gives a glimpse on the physical attributes of the landscapes as well, emphasizing, that exploring the northern lights is accompanied with the exploration of the

islands as well and the natural beauties form an important part of the experience. The exploration of the extraordinary nature is emphasized in the context of other activities as well: *“The mountains in Lofoten are unique – steep, lush and rising straight out of the sea.”* (XXLofoten about hiking) or *“Lofoten’s nature has unique and spectacular contrasts and kayaking is a great way to experience these.”* (XXLofoten about kayaking).

In the imagery, the sea and sea related activities such as fishing, became the central theme on many pictures, and this role is emphasized in the texts as well: *“Unstad, a small spot with a handful of little houses perched at the foot of the mountains from where we can admire the striking seascape.”*; *“If you are keen on fishing, then you should join a fishing trip, becoming a real Norwegian fisherman for one day.”* (Lofoten Lights); *“When you visit Lofoten it is all but compulsory to get out to sea and try your luck fishing.”* (XXLofoten).

With the examination of the images and the textual data that are transmitted by the DMO and the suppliers, it can be seen that the nature has an outstanding role in the destination image formation and it defines the adventurous activities as well. The images used by the tourism suppliers are in accordance with the DMO, however, they could display them in a more varied way, than the DMO did. The textual data provided by the operators also gives a deeper depiction of the nature and the adventure tourism experiences, and helps to capture the way how they differentiate their products, yet regarding some activities (sea safari, surfing) it is still scarce.

4.4 The outstanding activities

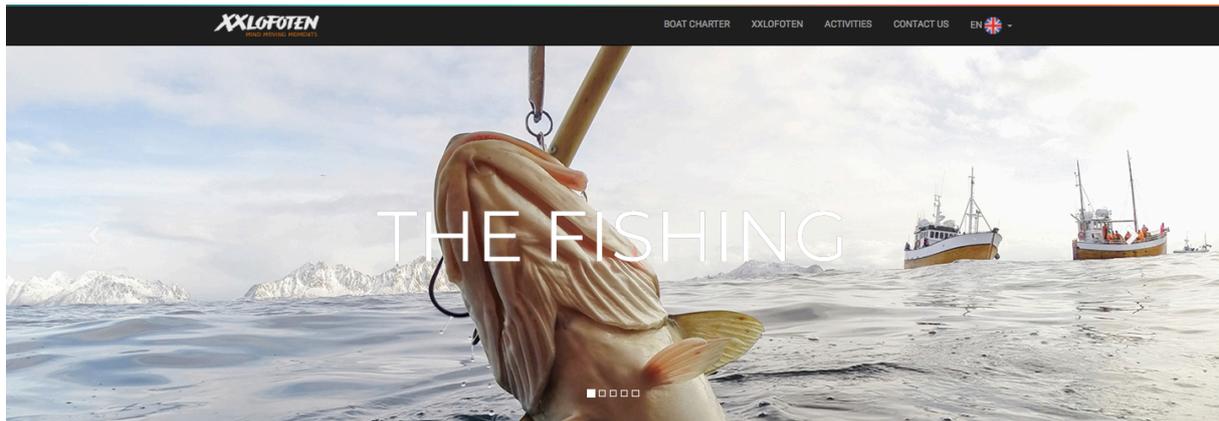
For the better understanding of the destination image, I aim to continue the analysis with the further examination of two activities, that I found outstanding and in the future, might have a stronger role in the differentiation of Lofoten as an adventure tourism destination. One of these activities seems to be especially important and already hugely contribute to the formation of the destination image. I found more visual and textual data about it, than any other activities, therefore I aim to investigate it deeper, and this activity is the fishing. The other activity represents an emerging subculture, an adventure tourism niche, that uses the unique physical attributes of Lofoten, and this is the fishing. In the following section, I aim to focus on these two activities in order to understand, how the DMO could reshape the image of Lofoten.

4.4.1 The fishing tradition

“Lofoten’s history revolves around fish.”

“Fish are still important in Lofoten to this day.”

(Travel Guide 2017 Lofoten)



WELCOME TO LOFOTEN

Figure 11. Lofotfishing is in the center of the imagery (xxlofoten.no)

As Howison et al. (2017, p.19) noted, the power of stories enhances the values and messages, that the DMO intends to depict with pictures. In the case of Lofoten, this story is connected to the fishing. Fishing is a recurring theme in the image of Lofoten and the DMO points many times, how this tradition still plays an important role in the everyday life and the tourism offer. *“The population has always fished all year round, usually alongside running small farms.”* (Travel Guide 2017 Lofoten, p.10). Indeed, fishing is an ancient activity and the population of Lofoten not only could survive through it, but develop as well. *“... fishermen from across the whole of Northern Norway flocked to Lofoten to take part in the Lofoten Fishery.”* *“The traditional fisherman’s cabin dates back at least 1000 years.”* (Travel Guide 2017 Lofoten, p.10). *“The Lofoten Fishery is an ancient livelihood.”* The fishing has such a powerful narrative, that the DMO not only connects the local identity to this activity, but points out, that the whole Norwegian history was influenced by it and defined the development path of the country. *“It was the cod that gave us the power and money necessary to establish the church, an administration, monarchy and government and, eventually, our own parliament. The cod made it possible to build the nation stone-by-stone. Without it, people would not have settled in Northern Norway.”*, *“Without the cod, the Vikings would never have existed either. ... because*

in stockfish, they had a nutritious food with an unlimited expiry date which made it possible to survive long voyages to Greenland, Russia and the far south of Europe – even to America, 500 years, before Columbus.” (Travel Guide 2017 Lofoten, p.21). The travel – fish element regarding the Vikings is a good example, how a traditional activity which once meant the only livelihood for the locals and helped them so far in the flourishing of their culture has been “recycled” and now consumed as tourism product (Hall, Müller & Saarinen, 2009, p.20). The interpretation of the fishing activity can be approached from so many directions: an adventurous activity, a tourism product or an element in the destination image. In the next part I aim to introduce, how the DMO projects it.

4.4.2 The fishing trips

“When you visit Lofoten it is all but compulsory to get out to sea and try your luck fishing.”

(xxlofoten.no)

The above mentioned quote describes how the fishing is related to the Lofoten experience: if the visitors want to fully indulge in the local atmosphere, they have to embark on a fishing trip. These are available all year round, however, the most famous fishery is the Lofotfisket or Lofotfishing which takes place from January to mid-April, when the large number of skrei (Norwegian Arctic cod) migrates to the shores of Lofoten. This tradition has been around for hundreds of years and even today plays an important role in the local economy, not just because of its touristic importance (Travel Guide 2017 Lofoten).

XXLofoten offers traditional fishing trips that takes at least four-hour. The crew members are professional fishermen, who *“know these seas like their own back pocket. They provide all the information you need about what you can expect from your day out, safety on board, and they will teach you how to use the fishing tools and equipment featured on board”* (xxlofoten.no). This information shows that the participants do not only take part in the activity as observes, but they can actively engage themselves in the fishing and the crew members, who are not only guides but professional fishermen involve them even deeper in the experience, with teaching the necessary techniques. This is in accordance with the knowledge-based nature of adventure tourism: the participants not only enrich with the experience, but learn a skill (or at least the basics of that skill) that they can bring back home with them (Hall, Müller & Saarinen, 2009, p.6).

The text also contains background information about the actual boat, they sail out with, which turned out to be very special. *“MS Symra is a traditional fishing cutter, and she turns 100 years old in 2017. She is protected by the Norwegian Directorate for Cultural Heritage. Symra is a comfortable boat originally built specifically for fishing in Lofoten and she is certified for 38 passengers.”* The boat itself forms an important part of the tradition as a living heritage, and despite of its age, it is in still active use. This gives a more authentic dimension of the trip and brings the tradition closer to the tourists.



Figure 12. Tourists during the fishing trip (xxlofoten.no)

The text continues with the description of route and the on-board experience: *“We sail out of Svolvær, past the Fisherman’s Wife statue, and head out to the fishing banks we know from experience can provide a good catch, with location varying depending on the season. There are 10 fishing stations on board, so our guests must expect to share these between them on the trip. But not worry, we expect you will be very satisfied by the time we head back to port.”* The latter sentence assumes co-operation and teamwork within the guests, but also assures about that sharing the fishing stations do not affect the individual experience.



Figure 13. A tourist with a well-deserved catch (xxlofoten.no)

The learning process continues, when the participants succeed to catch a fish: *“We teach you to fillet it on board, and of course you can take it home with you if you wish. We also offer vacuum packing if you don’t anticipate to consume the fish during your stay in Lofoten.”* Having a catch is a very rewarding aspect of the trip and with the instructions of the fishermen, the participants can learn how to fillet it, thus this reward gets symbolic meanings: it becomes a good story and enhance the positive experiences about the trip, on the other hand, it becomes a souvenir, which has more value behind as the visitors did not only buy something in a shop, but actually participated in the acquisition of it. The text also describes the target group of the trip: *“We have made this trip for those who have little or no fishing experience, but who would like to try fishing during the seasonal fishery’s winter conditions.”*

Despite the fact that the ancient profession of fishing and the encounter of the wilderness is “locked up” in a packaged trip, the different elements of it make it as traditional and authentic as possible. The curiosity of this activity is that the tourists can join the locals, real fishermen, who give insights how the life is on the sea, while the tourists have the chance for the immersion in the nature. XXLofoten summarize the experience with the following: *“You will receive*

professional guidance by our crew during the trip, and experience a taste of how Lofotfisket takes place through stories and anecdotes accompanying the activities on board.”

XXLofoten offers other, fishing related activities, such as the Lofoten Seafood Theatre. The description about it very short, but interesting: *“Lofoten Seafood Theatre is the journey from the catch to the meal in three stages. From the ocean to the dinner table in one day.”* This package connects together all the key selling points: nature, adventurous activity, coastal culture and fresh seafood.

4.4.3 Surfing – Unstad Arctic Surf



Figure 14. Surfer on Unstad Beach during winter time (Instagram, @emrahkola)

A person, standing with a surfboard on a snow-covered beach and a mountain in the background is an unusual spectacle, and most likely not this image would be associated with surfing for many people. However, on Lofoten this is ordinary, as the archipelago gives home to the world northernmost surfing destination. The DMO aims to promote Lofoten as a destination with untamed nature, with the promise of unusual activities for people who are demanding and not afraid to challenge themselves. Surfing is an activity that fits under these conditions. Unstad is a small village with around 100 inhabitants, situated on northern part of the island of Vestvågøy. The picturesque landscape, incredible waves and the natural phenomena made this place world-

famous among the surfers. The road lead up until this was long though, and there is as unusual story behind it.

The website of Unstad Arctic Surf (UAS) depicts the story of the first surfers in Unstad bay: *“Since 1963 there have been surfers at Unstad bay. Thor Frantzen and Hans Egil Krane were probably the first surfes in Norway. As young boys, they had to work on ships to earn money. The ships traveled worldwide and in Sydney, they saw and tried surfing for the first time. Back home in Lofoten they had to make their own boards. At that time, the famous Beach boys were on all top hit lists and the only outline of a surfboard they had was the cover of the Beach Boys album Surfin’ Safari from 1962. So off they went and made their own surfboards from this cover. These boards can be seen at Unstad.”* *“In 2003, Unstad Camping was a reality. It was founded by Thor Frantzen and his wife Randi and in the beginning, there were only a few cabins. They build some new cabins, started up a restaurant and began to rent out a few surfboards.”* (unstadsurf.com). This story is about creativity and ingeniousness, but first of all passion and perseverance. The UAS promotes the beach as *“The most beautiful place in the world. The Atlantic ocean gives this surf destination world class waves”* and nowadays offers weekend and beginner packages, camps and even surf competition. The camps are organized during the summer and recommended *“... all ages wanting some memorable days in the magical islands of Lofoten”*. The best period for beginners/intermediate is April – September, whereas advanced levels can try themselves between September – April. Lofoten.info characterizes the Arctic surf experience with these words: *“Strong winds and short period swells dominate but the varied geography can accommodate multiple options. The lack of daylight in winter, when the best swell arrives is an intractable issue. The flip-side being almost continuous light throughout the summer. Really only surfed in since the 1990s as wetsuit technology developed, there now exists a thriving little surfing community.”* This approach depicts the relative easiness of surfing during the summer months, whereas the winter is rough and suitable only for the most dedicated people, due to the harsh weather conditions and the lack of daylight. The circumstances that shape this experience and the continuous fight with the natural elements evoke the statement about the early Arctic visitors, who pleasantly exposed themselves to unpleasant conditions (Toivanen, 2006, p.21). Ultimately, this is the main purpose of adventure: stepping out the comfort zone and accepting *“... the negative aspects of adventure in return for valuable experiences”* (Swarbrooke et al., p.12). The text also points out that surfing in the Arctic is a relatively new activity as the technology that makes it possible to surf throughout the whole year is only available since the 1990s. These facts make it an

adventure niche segment, which is suitable for those who are looking for something truly unique.

Unstad is small and remote village, with lack of facilities, therefore UAS had to create them. They offer equipment, food, accommodation and transportation. They characterize their services with high-quality: *“We only use the best equipment available. The boards for our camps are designed to let you learn surfing quickly and easily.”* or *“We provide you with lots of good, local and healthy food.”*



Figure 15. Surfers in Unstad bay, snowy mountains in the background (unstadsurf.com)

Lofoten Masters

Although UAS is still reserved for a small group of surfers, it is getting more famous from year by year. Lofoten Masters is *“the world’s most northernmost surfing contest”* and in 2017 celebrated its 10th anniversary. Originally, the Lofoten Masters was meant to create an opportunity for the local surfers, where they can meet and have fun, but throughout the years it grew to an international contest, catching the media’s attention worldwide. The organizers vision is *“to create Europe’s finest surf competition”* (lofotenmasters.com).

4.3 The “outsiders’” perceptions about Lofoten

Until now, I introduced, which values are projected by the “insiders” such as the DMO and the tourism suppliers and in the followings, I intend to complete this pictures with the perceptions and stories, that are “out there” about Lofoten and circulate as word-of-mouth by “outsiders”. I found it important, because these help the better understanding how the DMO could use them to its advantage. These derive from blogs that were published recently.

Blogs

“Analyzing blogs not only help to conduct market research, but might define the strengths and weaknesses of a destination and depict a more shaded image” (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008, p.14).

The three blogs I chose for focus on the Norwegian tourism in general and Lofoten represents a small piece in it. I concentrated what they are saying about the activities and how they perceive it as an adventure destination. First of all, I introduce what is said about Lofoten in general. *“The Lofoten Islands are truly the most fascinating place in Norway” “Expensive activities, rent a car and see the archipelago instead of touristic tours”* (snowintromso.com, 2015), *“Lofoten is perfect for outdoor adventures. Lofoten is a mecca for hiking, climbing, fishing, kayaking, skiing, surfing (in the summer AND winter) and cycling. The tourist scene there has a very young vibe, with lots of budget accommodation, and even the luxury accommodation markets itself towards adventure seekers”* (heartmybackpack.com, 2016). The overall perception of Lofoten is very positive, characterizing it as a perfect adventure tourism location and listing those activities that were already mentioned above. The surfing is highlighted with the emphasizes of its availability throughout the whole year. The atmosphere is described as typically suitable for the younger people, and describes that even the more luxurious accommodation providers target the adventure tourists. An another blog entry describes their accommodation like this: *“The fishermen lived in small huts (rorbuer) which were remodeled to nice holiday appartments nowadays. These “rorbuer” are usually small cabins directly at the waterline that originally were inhabited by fisherman during the fishing seasons. Nowadays they are renovated and, depending on the type, equipped with all kinds of amenities. Our had floor heating, modern kitchen and a fire place, to create a cozy atmosphere and to forget the world outside”* (explore-norway.org). This latter one shows again, how the living heritage can be preserved through transforming it into a tourism commodity. There were statements, that

depicted a less positive picture though. *“Tourism has just recently exploded on the Lofoten Islands. While just a few years ago most of the people I would tell about Lofoten had never heard of the islands, now – largely thanks to Instagram! – they’re very much on people’s radar. But Lofoten’s big reputations doesn’t mean it’s set up as a big tourist destination (at least not yet). The huge influx of tourists has also been a bit of a surprise to the locals, who might not have signed up to live on the set of a photo shoot”* (heartmybackpack.com, 2015). This that neither the local infrastructure, nor the locals are prepared for the massive tourism influx that recently appeared on the islands. Also mentions the social media’s role in this case: the Instagram images actually heavily aroused the interest towards the islands. There is another example, when the Instagram proved to be a more effective information source: *“I discovered Unstad by “accident”. We were preparing our Lofoten road trip with the usual sources to plan a vacation: travel guides, Tripadvisor and asking people we know who had been there. None of them mentioned Unstad. Instead, I saw a picture of Unstad Beach on Instagram a couple of weeks prior to our trip and decided to go there! It just seemed so beautiful and I wasn’t disappointed at all”* (snowintromso.com, 2015).

I continued the investigation what is said about the seasons on Lofoten: *“There is one seasons that I find particularly suited for a visit: Autumn! ... it’s pitch black during winter because of polar night, crowded during summer with cruise ship tourists and smelly during spring as that’s when cod is dried outside. Autumn is a low season, just before the winter and northern lights seasons hits completely, September and October are way less crowded and much more enjoyable.”* (snowintromso.com, 2015). The perception of the author is that the perfect time of the year to visit Lofoten is early autumn, when there is not so dark yet, such as winter, and not so crowded, as during the summer. She describes autumn as a low season, therefore much more enjoyable, which is situated between the two peak seasons.

5. Discussion

In this chapter the findings through the DMO, tour operators and UGC will be compared and discussed. Certain topics are recurring on the DMOs webpage, but there are also approaches that are only pointed out in the UGC or tourism suppliers. Furthermore, I will discuss, where the DMO should consider about reshaping its image formation.

With the examination of the collected material on the destination image of Lofoten I found the pattern, that was depicted by Visit Norway (2012, p.17), for the key selling points: unique landscapes and nature based phenomena; nature-based activities; thriving coastal culture; fresh seafood and coastal specialties. These are all depicted and transmitted by both the local DMO and the tourism operators and fit into the overall image that Visit Norway intends to hold internationally. I intended to identify those “Lofoten specific” themes that could better differentiate it from other parts of Norway, and which would be suitable for the elimination of the seasonal impacts. With my research, I distinguished three specific areas that are depicted in both the visual and textual data: soft adventure tourism, heritage tourism and adventure tourism niche.

Soft adventure tourism

Most of the textual and visual data projected by the DMO and the tourism suppliers evolved around the soft adventure activities of hiking, climbing, kayaking, cycling and diving. The perception by the UGC identifies Lofoten as the perfect place for outdoor adventure, therefore the desired image by the DMO reflects in the “electronic word-of-mouth”. These activities do not require special skills, thus anyone can easily attend them. They are promoted both by the DMO and the tourism suppliers, that are available throughout the whole year, however some discrepancies can be found between the DMO and the tourism operators in the differentiation of the seasons. The DMO intends to divide the year for the four seasons, with the portrayal of the typical activities that can be practiced in the certain seasons, whereas the tourism operators differentiate the two peak seasons: winter and summer. In fact, the tourism suppliers could more successfully differentiate the seasons in their visual imagery, because it shows a more unified image of each seasons, whereas the DMO overused the same pictures and the certain activities were always shown only in one season (either in winter or summer setting), which resulted a mixed imagery.

The other problem with the differentiation of the four seasons is that the natural phenomena are dominating in the imagery. Either they are depicted as an individual attraction or a special background for an adventure activity, they play an important role in the image formation. Indeed, many adventurous activities such as kayaking, horseback riding and hiking are mainly depicted with the background of the midnight sun or the northern lights to make them more appealing. This kind of portrayal both has positive and negative aspects that needs to be considered. The positive aspects are that it helps the differentiation of Lofoten as an adventure tourism destination among other destinations in Norway, and the portrayal of the natural phenomena suggests more added values to the activities and makes the experience more unique. Although the negative aspect of this visualization is that it enhances the seasonality, through overusing the images about summer and winter.

The midnight sun is connected to the summer, whereas the northern lights are connected to the winter, which enhances the perceptions that in reality there are two main seasons on Lofoten that are worth the visit. Even the UGC confirms this with describing that autumn is indeed a low or transitional season, when the summer tourists already left and the visitors who are chasing the northern lights, have not arrived yet. However, this fact is depicted positively, stating that the low number of tourists makes this season more attractive, than the summer, in addition the weather conditions are more optimal for a visit than during winter. The DMO could embrace these positive perceptions about autumn/spring with the implementation of personal reflections and narratives among its own textual data, derived from the visitors. This approach might help to make the spring and autumn “visible” for the future tourists.

The nature plays an important role in the adventure experience, and the critics regarding adventure activities often highlights that this form of tourism disturbs fragile environments and the wilderness (Chen, 2015, p. 8). The positive aspects of the adventure tourism products on Lofoten are similarly depicted by the DMO and the tourism operators. These activities offer high-quality experiences, guided by local people who are experienced and have extensive knowledge about the nature. In addition, the tours are designed for small groups, which gives a more personal atmosphere them and means less disturbance for the nature. The presentation of the adventure tourism products targets demanding tourists, who are sensitive about the environment. On the other hand, perceived by the UGC, these guided tours are too expensive and suggests to rent a car instead and explore the islands individually.

Heritage adventure tourism

The fishing strongly defines not just the identity and the livelihood of the locals on Lofoten, but also the tourism industry. The formation of the destination image heavily relies on it and it can be determined, that alone is visualized as much as the other activities altogether. The importance of the fishing is not only represented in the imagery, but the powerful narratives as well that are attached to it. The fishing activity itself fits into various forms of tourism: adventure, cultural and heritage tourism. In this thesis, it is examined from the viewpoint of adventure tourism. As it was already mentioned above, the main criticism against adventure tourism is that disturbs the wilderness and makes irreversible harm to the nature. Although this case serve as an example for how adventure tourism can function as a preservative form of tourism.

The general perception about fishing is that the Lofoten experience cannot be complete, if the tourists do not embark on a fishing trip. These trips are also tailored for small groups, just the other activities and the guides are actually local fishermen, whom presence strongly influence the experience. Their expertise and knowledge is important, because under their guidance the tourists themselves become fisherman for a day. They are taught to techniques that can be useful in the long run and if they are lucky enough, they can return with their catch. This experience has so many dimensions beside the thrilling factor that accompanies the adventurous activities. It gives the opportunity to experience the local lifestyle and get insights about Lofoten's history. The use of a 100-year old boat also shows that with the proper control, adventure tourism does not mean danger for the environment, but helps to protect it.

Despite its domination in the imagery, its portrayal is fragmented. There are many little pieces about it scattered around the DMO's and the tour operators websites, yet there is no one special activity or theme, that organizes together these pieces. There is a slight coherence in the visualization of them, but with superficial inspection this is not unequivocal. These pieces are the local cuisine connected to the fish, the rorbuer (the small fishing cabins), that nowadays are used as accommodation by the tourists and the small fishing villages that can be found around the islands. Although there is an attempt for the connection of these elements, the Seafood Theatre by XXLofoten, that was invented to "follow" the fishes' way from the catch to the table, the textual information is too scarce about it to make any conclusions. The introduction of a product, that involves all these elements could offer an activity series for days, and more deepen the experience connected to fishing. In addition, it would form a more complex image

about the fishing tradition. The fishing is also available throughout the year which makes it suitable to offset the impacts of seasonality.

Surfing – the adventure tourism niche

The third area that I identified to have a potential to enhance the uniqueness and untamed characteristics of the Lofoten Islands, is an exciting niche segment within the adventure tourism: surfing. Opposite to the fishing, this is a very fresh activity, with a history that dates back only to 50 years. It only gained fame around the world about 10 years ago, with the organization of the first surf competition.

This fresh activity is outstanding among the other adventure tourism products, because surfing is associated with places like Australia, but the Arctic is a very unusual setting for it and this is exactly that means challenge and gives its appealing characteristic. It emerged out of nothing and its background story depicts adventure, perseverance and creativity. Surfing on Lofoten unifies the very basic concept of adventure tourism and type of the tourists who decide to explore the north: an activity that is off the beaten track for those who are not afraid to willingly expose themselves to unpleasant situations. However, this characteristic makes it a tourism niche: this is not suitable for everyone, but for those few people who are willing to pushing their own limits.

The landscape and the waves create a unique mixture, although these were not enough to maximize the tourism experience. In their products, the UAS accomplished with the surfing that the other tour operators missed with the fishing: besides one day trips, they offer complex packages and camps, with accommodation, food and transportation. They had to build the infrastructure around the surfing activity, because Unstad is a very small and isolated village. This enables the UAS to organize events, for example the camps and the Lofoten Masters that take more days. This provided independence to the UAS in addition helped to survive and grow throughout the years.

Surfing also can be done all year round, although there is a distinction between the seasons and the tourists, as the winter is recommended only for the experienced and advanced surfers, whereas during the summer UAS offers beginner courses.

Suggestions regarding the image formation

Lofoten is a very fortunate destination, because many factors make it an exciting and unique destination. I identified three areas, that are very promising and already presented in the destination image, however, with some reshape, they could transmit a more powerful image about Lofoten. The brand values that were defined by the Visit Norway characterize Lofoten as well: it's pure nature and the natural phenomena make it fresh and real, the activities make it adventurous and the unusual activities such as surfing make it open-minded. On the other hand, the destination image is too systematically built on the four key selling points that have been already introduced, that it rather means a disadvantage as the unique characteristics of Lofoten are forced to the periphery. My suggestion is that instead of focusing on the individual introduction of the key selling points, the DMO and the travel operators should rather build stories around the activities and depict them in a more complex way. Now, the DMO's image formation pays too much attention on the individual and separated representation of the key selling points, that the connected images of certain activities, such as fishing become separated.

In addition, the DMO's presence in the social media is active, and abundant imagery is posted and reposted about Lofoten, however, certain themes are overrepresented in the imagery. The domination of the portrayal of the natural phenomena, especially in the case of the northern lights characterizes both the DMO's social media accounts and the tourism operators' websites. The problem with it is that these pictures enhance the perceptions that there are two main seasons on Lofoten, and leave spring/autumn "invisible". The solution for this could be to share less about the natural phenomena and enhance the images that are connected to spring and autumn. In addition, more stories and narratives should be depicted in the textual data, that derive from visitors and UGCs. In the case of the imagery it is already realized, with reposting the visitors' photos on the DMO's Instagram account, but the same practice is missing from the textual data. Sharing small stories, that derive from visitors, could help to make "visible" the low seasons and arouse the interest of future tourists.

6. Conclusion

This project has analyzed and discussed the projected image about the Lofoten Islands by the DMO and the tourism suppliers, in addition aimed to give suggestions for the reshape of the image in order to more effectively eliminate the undesired effects of the seasonality.

The DMO holds a versatile image about Lofoten and the various areas that were identified through the examination of its image, makes it difficult to categorize this destination. Based on Swarbrooke et al. (2003, p.14) typologies about adventure tourism destinations, the following facts can be defined about Lofoten. It is a modern tourism destination, as the Arctic regions have only been discovered by the increasing number of tourists in the past few years (Müller, Lundmark & Lemelin, 2013, p.15) partly because of the influence of social media. Despite its reputation, it cannot be considered as a big tourism destination. Fishing has always been considered to be the main activity in the islands and it became a tourism commodity as well in the recent years. Still nowadays, Lofoten is famous for this activity which plays an important role in the projected image by the DMO. The archipelago is the typical venue for soft adventure activities, as beside fishing, hiking, horseback riding, cycling, kayaking and scuba diving are all can be found among the adventure tourism offer, although the niche segment of surfing also can be found.

The adventure tourism activities are actively promoted and encouraged throughout the whole year, yet there is a strong seasonality that characterizes the destination, with July being the busiest month. The venues for adventure tourism are natural, as the landscapes and nature play an important role in the adventure experience of Lofoten.

Despite the discrepancy of the differentiation of the seasons between the DMO and the tourism operators, their images are in accordance with each other and the perceived image by the UGC reflects this desired image, with an overall positive opinion. The destination image also reflects the key selling point of Visit Norway: fresh seafood and coastal specialties, thriving coastal culture, the unique landscapes and natural phenomena, nature-based activities. On the other hand, the image, built by the DMO is too systematically connected to these selling points, which resulted that the portrayal of some unique and “untamed” characteristics of Lofoten (such as the surfing) are lost in the destination image, which too strongly reflects the overall destination image of Norway. Instead of focusing the patterns, set up by these selling points, the DMO should enhance the destination image according to the three areas of soft adventure activities, fishing traditions and adventure tourism niche.

The imagery reflects the use of the social media and the UGC, however the textual data should embrace more the word-of-mouth and with its help make the autumn and spring “visible” for the visitors.

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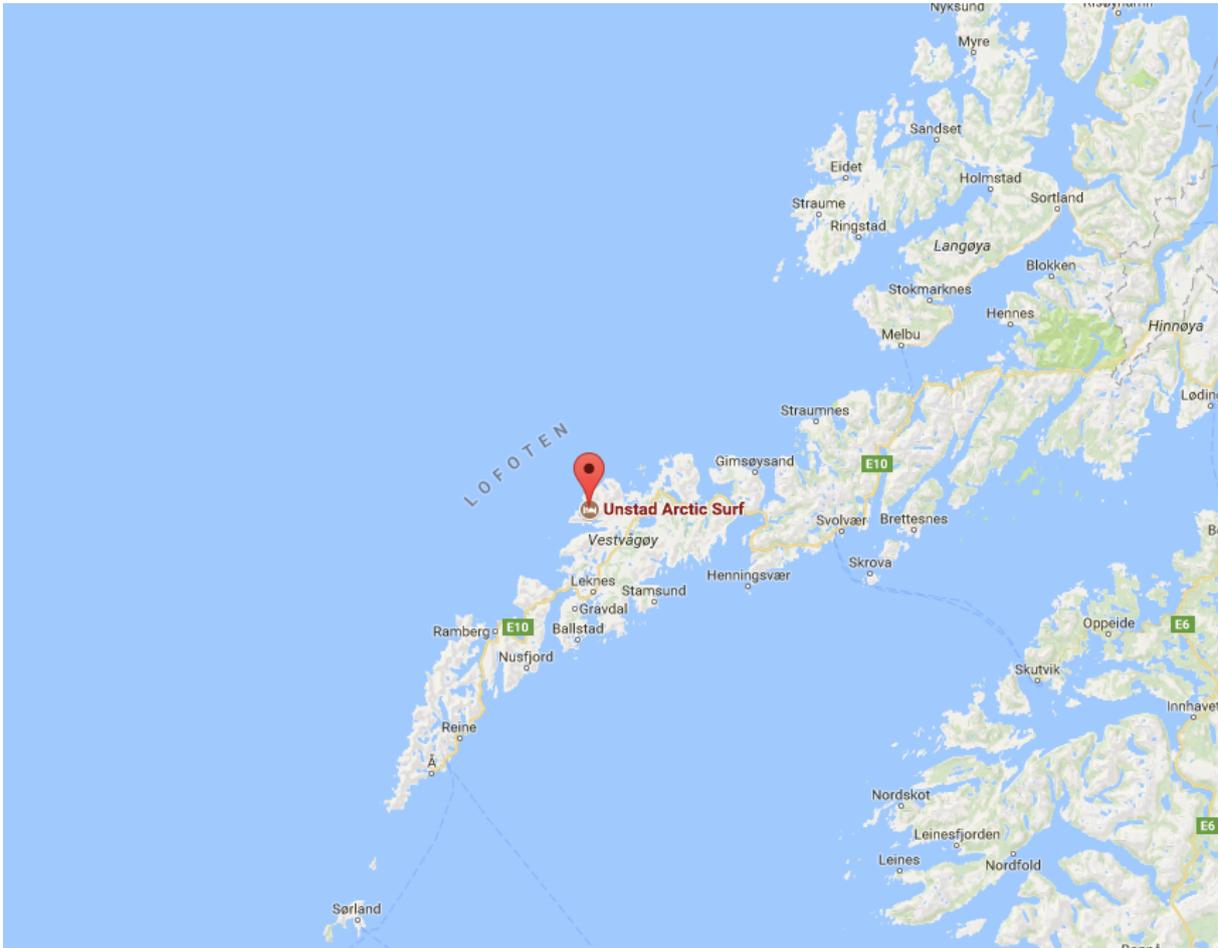
APPENDICES

Appendix I



Map of the Lofoten Islands and their location in Norway (rando-lofoten.net, nordictravel.com.au)

Appendix 2



The location of Unstad Arctic Surf(google.dk/maps)

Appendix 3



Traffic during the summer (nrk.no)